

DEIST Confuted.

WHEREIN

His principal OBJECTIONS, against
REVEALED RELIGION, especially
against CHRISTIANITY, are briefly
stated and answered.

BEING AN

ABRIDGMENT

Of the Whole

CONTROVERSY.

Occasioned by some late BOOKS and
PAMPHLETS.

L O N D O N:

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TO THE
RIGHT REVEREND
THE
Lord BISHOP
AND
CLERGY
OF
LONDON;
AND TO
The CLERGY of the City of
Westminster,
AND
Borough of *Southwark,*
THIS
TREATISE
IS
Most humbly Dedicated.

TO THE
RIGHT REVEREND
THE
Lord Bishop
AND
CLERGY

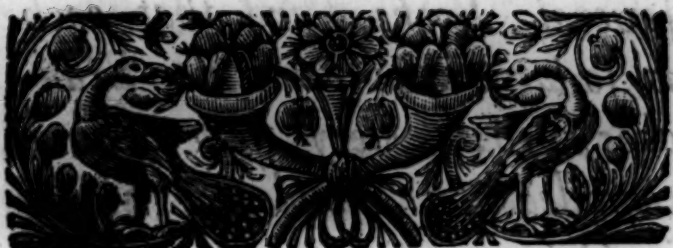


The Clergy of the City of
Westminster

Borough of Westminster

THE
ATTORNEY

General



T H E
P R E F A C E.

AFTER so many learned Treatises which have been published upon this Subject already, some Readers might be apt to think that any Thing which can possibly be said farther upon it, must be entirely Needless and Impertinent; but this Objection will soon vanish, if it be consider'd, that most of what
has

The PREFACE.

has been said, is dispersed in several Books, and that each is so large upon particular Branches, that very few have compiled a compleat System in Defence of Religion against all its Opposers. To supply, as much as I could, this Defect, I have given the Reader an Abstract of the principal Objections against Revealed, and in particular, the Christian Religion; that so he may be able, by seeing the Objections briefly answered, to see the unreasonableness of those Prejudices which Men have taken up against it as to their Cavils against the Holy Scripture in general, and Misrepresentations of particular Passages and Texts in it. I have wholly
omitted

The P R E F A C E.

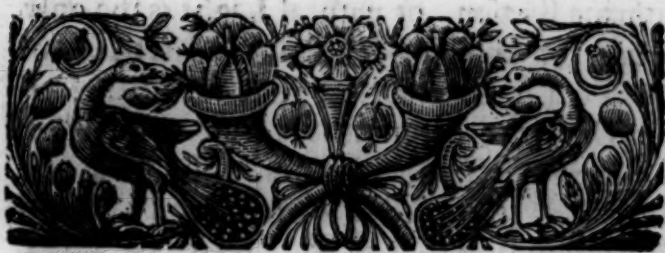
omitted answering them, because that is done already so well by a very eminent **H**and, that to add to, or diminish any Thing from it, would be a fruitless and impertinent Undertaking. All, therefore, which I have done, is briefly to State, and answer their **O**bjections in general against **R**evelation. And, indeed, if we consider the *Violence* of these **A**tttempts which have been made to shake the very **F**oundations of **C**hristianity by some late infidel **W**riters, and their **F**ollowers, how first the person and **M**iracles of our **S**aviour, afterwards his **D**octrines, have been vilify'd and exploded, then how he has been reproach'd in the **P**erson of those who have the **C**are and **G**overnment of his **C**hurch, how no rank and order of **M**en
in

THE PREFACE.

in it have been spar'd, but they have been under fictitious Names, treated with the foulest Language that Impudence and ill Manners can invent: I say, if we reflect upon the Malice and Rage of these Enemies of Religion, no Man who professes himself a Christian, and much more a Clergyman, can think his Time ill employ'd in using all his Efforts to stop this over-flowing Torrent of Propbanness and Infidelity: This is my Design in publishing this small Treatise, and if I shall be herein of any Service to the Cause of Religion, I have my Reward; but if not, I have the Testimony of my Conscience, that I have us'd my utmost Endeavour.



CHAP.



C A P. I.

An Abridgement or Summary of the whole Controversy, of the Extent of the Law of Nature; of the Origin of its Obligation; of the Law of Fitness, and how far it is a Rule both to God and Man; of Attonements, and particularly of that of Jesus Christ; no eternal Relations of Things independent on the Will of God.

THE Adversaries of the Christian Religion endeavour to support their Cause upon the Sufficiency, and absolute Perfection of the Light of Reason, or natural Religion; and by Arguments drawn from that, as well as the Nature of God, endeavour to prove, that no Religion can come from God, which is not fully manifest to all Mankind by the meer Light of Nature; that
B humane

humane Reason, or natural Light is the only Means of knowing all that God requires of us, That it is a perfect Rule for all religious Duties, as it proceeds from a Being of infinite Perfection, Wisdom, and Goodness; and needs no Assistance from any external Revelation; is that absolute Test, by which we are to judge of the Perfection of every other Law, and that it differs from external Revelation, only in the manner of its being communicated. And that therefore, if God be not an arbitrary Being, he can require nothing of us by Revelation, but what is equally required by the Light of Nature. And lastly, That whatever was an Inducement to infinite Wisdom to make known his Will to Mankind by Way of Revelation, the same oblig'd him at all Times, Places, and to all People, to vouchsafe it to them.

These are the principal Tenets which I have undertaken to confute in the following Sheet,; which I shall do, by proposing each Objection in its full Force and Vigour, then answering it. And First, I shall consider the Law of Nature, and the Objection from thence usually drawn against the Usefulness of a divine Revelation.

The Law of Nature has been taken in a two-fold Sense; and first, it is the Belief of the Existence of a God, and the Sense and Practice of those Duties which result from the Knowledge we by our Reason have of him
and

and his Perfections, and of our selves and our Imperfections, and the Relation in which we stand to him and our Fellow-creatures. Or, Secondly, Such a Collection of moral Principles and Precepts, as are founded in the Nature and Reason of Things: From whence they draw the following absurd Conclusions. 1st. *That the Religion of Nature takes in every Thing founded on the Nature and Reason of Things.* 2dly, *That our Obligation to obey this Law, is founded on the Reason and Fitness of Things; and therefore, 3dly, An external Revelation must be entirely useless.*

To which I answer, That in whichsoever of these Senses we understand the Law of Nature, the Conclusions thence drawn are most absurd and unreasonable.

*First, As to that, That the Religion of Nature takes in every thing founded on the Nature and Reason of Things: I say, 'tis most absurd, if we consider it in the former Sense; for, according to that, humane Reason must be commensurate to all Truth, **
which

* This is the Objection which Dr. Conebare makes to this Conclusion; to which it may be answer'd, That the Dr. here detracts from the Sufficiency of the Law of Nature, by denying it to have that Power which cannot be asserted to belong to Revelation it self, in saying, That according to this Conclusion, humane Reason must be commensurate to all Truth; for even divine Revelation it self is not commensurate

which the fondest Advocates of humane Reason cannot assert.

But if by the Law of Nature we understand such a Collection of Principals and Precepts, as are founded upon the eternal Natures, Reasons, and Relations of Things, and their absolute Fitness. The first Conclusion is true, but not the latter; for, however comprehensive and compleat the Law of Nature in itself may be in that Sense, yet if we are not capable of comprehending all the Doctrines and Precepts which it contains, a Revelation will be useful

surate to all Truth: But the Dr. is not at all oblig'd to maintain, that Revelation has any such comprehensive Power. In proving the Falshood of that Assertion. all that he was oblig'd to maintain, is, that humane Reason has no such Power; not that Revelation has. For supposing we grant, that neither of them have, yet the Usefulness of Revelation will sufficiently appear, when we shall have shewn, that the former comes short of the Perfection of the latter, in point of Clearness, and the Force of its Sanctions: That Revelation will make the great Truths and Obligations of natural Religion more plain and obvious, and more certain to all Capacities, will discover plainly the Acceptableness of Repentance towards God, and his Willingness to receive returning Sinners; and ascertain better the Truth of a future State of Rewards and Punishments, than natural Reason can be suppos'd to do, will discover what Foundation the most important Doctrines there taught, have in the Nature and Reason of Things; and adapt these Duties to the weak Capacities of Men, who thro' the Blindness of their Nature, were incapable of discovering them: Since the Law of Nature, as taken in the former Sense, comprehends such Duties only, as we by our Reason are capable of discovering from the Nature of Things: But of this we shall say more hereafter.

ful in assisting us to make such a Discovery : For, if we do not know what it contains, it cannot be to us a Law, as to the Penalty or coercive Part of it ; nor of Consequence, be obligatory, altho' it may as to the Rule, or directive Part : For, as to the coercive Part, nothing can have within the Force of a Law, but what we have Abilities sufficient to discover.

Promulgation is essential to every Law, and no other is sufficiently promulged, but what we can discover. 'Tis for this Reason that Brutes, Ideots, and Infants before they arrive at the Use of Reason, are absolutely incapable of knowing any Laws or Lawgivers, or the Obligations we lie under to obey them. Therefore they cannot be said to be capable of any moral Obligation at all. But that the natural Faculties of Men, even the most sagacious, are not capable of discovering all Duties founded on the Nature and Reason of Things, will be evident from hence, because they are incapable of discovering perfectly, what the Natures of those Things are which afford the various Sources of Duty ; *i. e.* the Existence and Perfections of God, the Nature and Imperfections of our selves ; the Relations we stand in to God, and our Fellow-Creatures, and the Natures of all those Beings, with which we are surrounded. And 1st, We may know that God is an infinite independent Being, Eternal,
Omnipotent

Omnipotent, Omniscient, Holy, Just, Good, &c. and endow'd with all Perfection : Yet I question, whether we are able to discover what all those Perfections are, or what others he may have ; especially, what natural Perfections he may have : For to do this, we ought to have a full View of the Nature of all Perfection in general. But in case we were able sufficiently to discover, that God is endow'd with all moral Perfections, and likewise what those Perfections are ; yet, as to the Exercise of them upon particular Occasions, we shall still be ignorant ; and what is most fitting for his Creatures to expect, or do upon the Account of these.

As to the Nature and Imperfections of our selves and others ; even here we are ignorant of many Things of Importance, which, if known, would oblige us to alter our Measures of Proceeding with Respect to both. For supposing, upon these Views we are to do all the Good we can, and as little Hurt to our Neighbours ; yet as Men are of a very indifferent Make from each other, are of different Capacities, and feel different Sentiments of Pleasure or Pain, of Good or Evil, agreeable or disagreeable from the same Impressions ; and as we are ignorant of the Natures of many Things that are without us ; so we may err much in the Application of these Rules, and may do such Things, and use such a Behaviour to some, which
may

may create Pleasure to them, and yet may be painful and disagreeable to others : The same may be said with respect to the various Abilities of Men, as we know not their different Conduct in private, or their inward Inclinations and Thoughts, we know not what is strictly reasonable for us to require of them, or how they are to proceed in various Instances ; or for what they are to be commended or blam'd.

But in case we should admit, that Men were capable by the mere Use of their Reason, to discover all Duties founded on the Natures and Reasons of Things, and of instructing others in them ; yet as in Fact they do not on Account of several Defects, both on the Part of those who are to instruct others in those Duties, and of those who are to be instructed in them : and of both, there can little Good be expected in the World by Instruction on the Part of the former ; the Want of Leisure, or Industry enough ; in others, the Want of Abilities, the Improvements of Education, or Opportunity to carry on the Business of Instruction effectually, or, perhaps, the Want of a clear Insight into the Dispositions and Tempers of those whom they are to instruct, or Skill to combat their Prejudices, and gain their Assent and Liking ; which is much more needful in practical than in speculative Teaching, where often plain Reasons will prevail, there being
no

no Passions in the Case to combat with : And on the Part of those who are to be instructed in those Duties, the Want of Leisure or Inclination to attend their Instructors, or a Disposition to receive their Instructions ; or, perhaps, the Want of Readiness, Diligence, and Constancy to learn, or sufficient Parts and Abilities, or the due Improvement of those they are Masters of, in the Practice of Reasoning, and collecting Truths from a Series of Inferences, which will be the Cause of much Difference, even in the Persons of the same Abilities, and with Respect to both Teachers, and those who are to be taught ; the Want of Diligence, disinterested, dispassionate, and uncorrupt Minds, to teach and receive such Instructions : Or lastly, the Want of Leisure to apply themselves to those Things only, to which their Capacities and Inclinations are suited ; as in Fact, I say, they do not what might be done by them, by the mere Use of their Reason, on Account of the aforementioned Defects ; there can but little Advantages be expected in the the World by Instruction.

Hence therefore appears the Necessity of a Revelation, to direct Mens Aims aright, to forward and assist their Endeavours, and to lay before them those Rules, for the Discovery of which, the wisest will take much Pains, and yet can hardly be able to discover.

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The Labours of learned Men, have indeed, been very serviceable to the World; who have exhausted their Strength by Study, in discovering many Rules of Morality very useful to it: notwithstanding they have never been able to compile a perfect System free from Errors; yet these have laid a Foundation for other worthy Men to refine upon them: and if humane Instructions, and those but imperfect, have been so useful for succeeding Generations, much more must divine, as commanding more Reverence and Attention than the others, to recommend and enforce the Practice of those Rules; which however known, would be liable, thro' the Blindness of Mens Passions, and the Strength of Temptations, to be neglected.

In a Word, if the Law of Nature be the Sense and Practice of those Duties which result only from the Knowledge we by our Reason have of God and his Perfections, and of our selves and our Imperfections; and if this Knowledge be but imperfect, it is most absurd to assert that it can discover all Duties founded on the Nature and Reason of Things; or, that the Light of Scripture is not necessary to help us out in making such a Discovery.

Ob. The Law of Nature is the Rule by which God directs his Actions; therefore

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that

that Rule must be perfect enough for his imperfect Creatures. And since our Perfection consists in imitating him, how can we conduct ourselves better than by directing our Actions by the same Rule by which he is directed.

Ans. The Rule by which God directs his Actions, and by which we direct ours, are vastly different. He governs his by a Rule which is absolutely perfect, *i. e.* his absolute Wisdom; but that by which we govern ours falls vastly short of it, as much as our weak Reason is inferior to the infinite Wisdom of the Great God.

Nor doth our Perfection consist in imitating God only in some general Rules, *i. e.* we ought to be just, pious, and holy: but, as to particular Instances of each, *i. e.* what acts can, and ought to be esteemed so, we are very often ignorant. Those Instances which may be so in the Supreme Being, may be vastly different in us, because his Relation to his Creatures is vastly different from ours; and there are many Virtues requir'd of us respecting both our selves and our Neighbours, in which the Supreme Being can have no Concern: so that our whole Perfection cannot possibly consist in imitating him.

As to what hath been asserted, that our Obligation to obey the Law of Nature is founded

founded on the unalterable Reason and Fitness of Things.

It has been before asserted, and that by no less a Man than the late Dr. *Clark*, who founds all eternal moral Obligations on I know not what, eternal necessary Deference of Things, p. 121. “ The necessary and eternal different Relations which
 “ different Things bear one to another,
 “ and the consequent Fitness or Unfitness
 “ of the Application of different Things,
 “ or different Relations one to another,
 “ unavoidably arising from that Difference,
 “ determine the Will of God, and ought
 “ also constantly to determine the Wills
 “ of all subordinate intelligent Beings.

The Weakness of which Reasoning will sufficiently appear in the latter Part of the Chapter, where we shall shew, that as all Things began to exist in Time, and nothing is eternal, but that God is the only eternal Being, so there is no such Thing as eternal Relations of Things, since God created all Things himself by the Word of his Power, and made them exist in such a Manner as they are. But the Doctor endeavours to make good his Assertion by this Argument, p. 111, 112, “ That
 “ there is a Fitness or Suitableness of
 “ certain Circumstances to certain Persons,
 “ &c. antecedent to Will, and to all arbitrary or positive Appointment whatsoever,
 “ ever,

“ ever, must be unavoidably acknowledg’d
 “ by every one, who will not affirm that
 “ it is equally fit and suitable that an inno-
 “ cent Being should be miserable, as that
 “ it should be free from Misery.

How a Being can be innocent ante-
 cedent to all Will or Appointment is be-
 yond my Comprehension to discover : but
 he may be so in Virtue of his Obedience,
 in all Respects, to those Laws which he
 knows it is the Will of his Maker he
 should obey ; or, briefly, because he does
 those Things which he ought to do, and
 omits the doing what ought not to be done
 in Virtue of that Will : but, suppose we
 should grant that there is such a Fitness
 of Things, as the Doctor has been speak-
 ing of, and a natural Discernment in Man
 to perceive it, yet there can be no In-
 ducement, no Obligation to act according
 to it, any otherwise than as our so doing
 may tend to some Good to our selves, or
 produce a sensible Pleasure, which I here
 call Good : it follows that when these are
 not to be attain’d by our so acting, then
 there can be no Inducement, and conse-
 quently, no Obligation : but when that
 Good is to be obtain’d, we are then oblig’d
 to act according to that Fitness : so that,
 according to yours, and the Doctor’s Hy-
 pothesis, if the Will of the Supreme Being
 does not oblige Men to act the contrary,
 they

they will be sometimes oblig'd to commit the vilest of Crimes, if by any means they have contracted such a vicious Disposition, as to take Pleasure in Unrighteousness; or, if Passion or Interest overbalance the Good, which would otherwise arise from acting according to the Fitness:

But then, when we look upon our Obligation to Obedience as arising from the Will of a Supreme Being, who hath a Right to command our Obedience, in Virtue of his creating, preserving, and affording us all the other Blessings we enjoy in this Life, and all we hope to enjoy in the next; and hath a Power to enforce it by suitable Rewards and Punishments, because of the Prospect which we have of Good or Evil to ourselves upon such our Conformity, or the contrary; that Will, so signify'd, so far as we have a Power to discern it, must be the proper and genuine Source of all moral Obligations: for, in a Word, God cannot be said to will any thing, because it was eternally reasonable and fit, antecedent to his Will; and therefore we were oblig'd to the Performance of it: but it is therefore reasonable, and our Duty, because he wills it.

Ob. I have heard your Answers, Sir, to my Objections with much Patience; and altho' I should allow what you have so
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strenuously contended for, that a Divine Revelation is useful to inform the weak Understandings of Men : yet I still affirm, that Man is not to admit of any Doctrine as reveal'd from God, but such as his own Reason can prove to be necessary from the Nature of Things ; since the Light of Nature can discover to ev'ry Man what is fit, and what is not : because 'tis impossible he should be ignorant of those Truths, which are so founded upon the Nature and Reason of Things.

An. If so, it must be beause there is something in Man's own Nature and Condition, which obliges him thus to abide by the Light of his own Reason ; otherwise, it is so far from being his Duty, that it is a most criminal Presumption, importing too great a Confidence in the Force and Excellency of his own Reason, as if it had a Right to determine all Matters relating both to God and Man ; a Presumption much greater than that of preferring our own Merit to that of our Fellow-Creatures, too haughty to adore any thing in the divine Councils, which it cannot fully comprehend. Doubtless it is our Duties to believe that God is wiser than we, and that he can teach us better than we can reach ourselves. Ev'ry thing that we know of God and of ourselves preaches up Humility

mility to us, as Sin, Death, and Hell are the Effects of that Spiritual Pride which turn'd Angels into apostate Spirits, and that there is nothing in the State and Condition of Man to oblige him to such a confident reliance upon his own Reason, I shall prove from the following Considerations.

Even as a moral and religious Agent, that Man is not free from Mysteries, for he cannot acknowledge a divine Providence, because its Proceedings are often very mysterious; or worship and adore God, whose Nature, Attributes, and Perfections we cannot thoroughly understand, without as much implicit Faith, and humble Submission of his Reason, as any reveal'd Mysteries require: so that if any Revelation is sufficiently attested to come from God, his State and Condition in the World obliges him to accept of it; because even without a Revelation he must acknowledge the Mysteries of Creation and Providence, and that even in a State of Innocence: and if in such a State they could not be oblig'd to discover what God could, or could not reveal to them of himself, as most certain they could not; or even their own future State without a Revelation: much less can they in a State of Sin, Ignorance, and Misery. So that the Condition of Man is so far from qualifying them to reject Revelation, that it seems absolutely

to require it, in order to enable them to know how they shall be freed from Guilt and Misery.

Obj. Since God only commands what the Nature of Things shews to be fit, it is scarce possible that Men should mistake their Duty, since a Mind that is attentive can as easily discern fit from unfit, as the Eye can Beauty from Deformity.

An. There is indeed a Fitness of Actions resulting from the Nature of Things and Persons, and the Relations which they bear to each other. The principal Duties we owe to God, our Neighbours, and our selves, are evident from the Relations we bear to each. From thence it likewise follows, that the Fitness of God's Actions are not known at all, or not fully comprehended by us; because, as nothing can be fit for him to do but what has its Fitness founded on his own incomprehensible Nature: and as his Nature is incomprehensible, so must the Will by which he acts: and we can no more tell what is fit for him to do in many Instances, what Duties he ought to require of us, antecedently to his positive Commands; then we can make ourselves, as he is, infinitely wise: but, altho' the principal Duties of Morality, or Natural Religion, may be obvious

vious enough to an attentive Mind; yet it will not be so easy without Teaching and Instruction to deduce the several Duties which are to be deduc'd from thence, to direct us how far in particular Cases they are to be extended.

Indeed, when God gives us any Commands, the Marks of divine Wisdom and Goodness impress'd upon them, will prove them to be fit and reasonable; altho' antecedently to the Commands, we could not have discover'd the Reasonableness of them: So that, altho' Revelation is not to impose any thing contradictory to Natural Religion, it may yet impose more than that does.

Obj. The End for which God hath given us Reason, is to compare Things, and the Relation they stand in to each other; and from thence to judge of the Fitness and Unfitness of Actions, and could not our Reason judge soundly in all such Matters, it could not have answered the End for which infinite Wisdom and Goodness bestow'd that excellent Gift upon us.

An. If this Argument proves any thing, it proves too much: for, since Reason was given us for the Discovery of all Truths; and since all Men have Reason, it would prove that all Men are capable of discover-

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ing all Truths: Yea, that all Men have equal Powers and Faculties for that End: since Reason was given for the same End to all.

The Truth is, God gave us our Reason for no other End than to discover what it is capable of discovering; and if we can't discover all Truths founded in the Nature and Reasons of Things: God gave us not our Reason for that End. That we cannot, I shall prove beyond Contradiction. First, That we ought to embrace all Opportunities of serving our Neighbours, and to avoid doing them any Prejudice are Duties which result from the Consideration of our being Fellow-Creatures, and Subjects of the Care of that Providence, to which we owe the Benefit of our Protection: Yet, in many Cases, we know not what will prejudice or serve our Neighbour, being ignorant of what Influence the Use and Application of certain Means will have on them.

Observation will direct us in the more obvious Appearances, but not in Things, whose Effects and Operations being more slow and gradual, are unknown to us.

From those Relations in which we stand to our Fellow-Creatures, *i. e.* Mankind in general, or single Persons in particular, we may learn all the social Duties of Life: Yet, as Parts of the whole System of Beings,

ings, a Point no less considerable, we may sustain several, as yet, unknown Relations, which may be the Reasons of some particular Behaviour, either Beneficial or Prejudicial to them ; which, if known, we might alter our Conduct for the good of the whole in many Cases. If the Schemes of humane Policy, the Grounds and Reasons of the Actions of Ministers of State, are unknown to us ; much less can we judge of the Administrations of Providence, and what is fittest and properest for us to do in all Cases with respect to the whole System of Beings. As to what is our Duty to be done to ourselves, with respect to natural Good ; we may still be as ignorant of that, as of any other thing, for we know not always what Actions or Omissions will conduce to it, because of our ignorance of the Natures of those Powers with which we have any concern, which, by an undue Use, may produce the Evil we would avoid : But were these Things perfectly understood, they would oblige us to alter our Measures in many Instances.

From the Consideration of God's being our Creator and Preserver, our Ruler and our Judge, there will arise an absolute necessity of our Obedience to his Will, to Love, Fear, Honour and Trust in him : but for ought we know, he may sustain other Relations to us, of which we may be ignorant ; which, altho' they will not afford

us Grounds of any new Duties, yet will be so many Recommendations and Enforcements of those Duties we owe him as Creator and Preserver ; which Duties, as well as the Reasons and Relations on which they are founded, will be unknown to us. Therefore as we know not the perfect Nature of all Things, and the Relations they stand in to each other, it is impossible we should understand the Fitness and unfitness of their Actions.

Obj. If God requires Duties of us, whose fitness our Reason cannot prove from the Nature of Things, he must be an arbitrary Being.

An. God's requiring of us Duties whose fitness our Reason, &c. necessarily, supposes him not to be an arbitrary Being, but to act according as the Perfections of his own Nature require him to act, *i. e.* according to his own Nature and infinite Perfections. So that there must be an utter impossibility of our comprehending the reasonableness and fitness of many of his Actions. But if he were an arbitrary Being, he might chuse to act according to our weak Nature, and suitable to our Comprehensions. The reason of Things, and the fitness of God's Actions, can't tell us how they mov'd him to create Mankind in such a State and Condition

Condition as they are now in, to form them in such a Manner, and bring them into such a World : This State and Condition more excelled our Reason and Comprehension, than any revealed Misteries whatsoever.

To know the reasonableness and fitness of the Former, as much concerns us as of the Latter : And if these Things are so, yet we cannot discover what Foundation they have in the Natures and Reasons of Things : Much less are we, to deny our assent to revealed Truths however mysterious. The Nature of human Souls, whether or no they præexisted before the Body, or were created immediately for it ; whether or no they are fallen Spirits ; and what is fittest they should be, *in these Cases* we have no Ability of our own to examine, but are forced to believe that God acts by us according to the Rules of Justice, or to believe there is no God at all. A more particular Revelation of those Things, wou'd not have perplexed us with greater Difficulties ; and made us less able to vindicate the Justice, and Goodness of God, than we now are. All our Knowledge being borrowed from Experience, and the Use of our Reason covers out inhuman Things ; So that our Notions between Equity and Justice, must accordingly be very limited. The Origin of Sin and Evil into the
World,

World, consistent with the Goodness of God is a great Complaint against natural Religion, and here is the forme Reason for Men to take Refuge in Atheism, because they can't in many Points defend the Justice of God, as there is for them who can't find the Reasons of the Christian Doctrine, to take Sanctuary in Infidelity. Nothing can be fit for God to do, but so far as it is fit for the Governor of all created Beings, and he can't act fitly toward us, but by acting in such a Manner, as the fitness of it shall be as much above our Reason to discover, as Creation is above our Power.

Obj. We can't fail of knowing the End which God had in being related to us as Creator and Governor, and what he requires of us as his Creatures, which the infinite Perfection and happiness of his Nature points out to us.

An. We don't understand what God's Infinite Perfection, according to which he governs us are, and therefore, as the Relation in which God stands to his Creatures is incomprehensible; so we cannot understand what his Conduct over us ought to be without Revelation, whether Men are considered either in a state of Innocence or Sin; by Reason that the fitness of Duties, or other Actions

Actions between all being related, must
 result from their Nature. But as we know
 on what human Relations are founded, by
 consequence we know what they require
 of us : But what Religion God's incompre-
 hensible Nature requires of us, himself a-
 lone can tell. For instance, there is nothing
 in the Nature of Sacrifices, considered as an
 human Invention, to prove it a reasonable
 Service ; but as it is a divine Institution, it
 must be such, because it proceeds from God.
 Man in a State of Innocence might perform
 his Duties of Obedience to God, but could
 not invent any, nor reject any that is ap-
 pointed. Such a State being an Argument why
 they should yield Obedience to divine Insti-
 tutions, in order to preserve them in it ; but
 a state of Sin makes it more difficult to in-
 vent any Religion proper for them ; nor can
 it be determined by human Reasons. We
 have nothing to help our Conception of the
 Relations in which God stands us as our Go-
 vernor and Preserver. But what we de-
 rive from the Notions we have of human
 Superiors, which neither separately nor joint-
 ly consider'd, give us any just Notion of
 what God requires of us, by reason that
 they do not help us thoroughly to under-
 stand those Relations, but are the properest
 Terms that human Language can invent,
 to represent Things Divine, and above our
 Comprehensions : Sin can't be strictly re-
 presented

presented by a Debt, a Wound, or any human Thing that we can compare it to, but is capable of receiving some kind of Representation from them. Since therefore the Nature of Sin, cannot be fully understood, therefore the Relation which God bears to us, and the Rule by which he ought to deal with us as Sinners, must be as unintelligible ; which Ignorance of ours may well justify the Attonement made by *Jesus Christ*.

Obj. Repentance is a sufficient Attonement for Sin ; therefore the Attonement made by *Jesus Christ* is absolutely unnecessary.

An. It can no more be prov'd the Repentance merits Pardon, (and there can be no Proof but from its Merits how it can be entitled to it,) than that the fallen Angels or any human Criminals can recover their former Innocence, by wishing they had not committed those Sins which caused their Fall and Guilt, and restore themselves to their former State with respect to God ; or than departing from a Leper must free us from the Infection which we have contracted by conversing with him ; and Reason is as much at a Loss, to tell us how Sin alters our State with respect to God, or what kind of Attonement is necessary to abolish the Guilt of it, as it is to tell what the internal Essence of God is.

Obj. Nature

Obj. Nature abhors all human Sacrifices and the Cruelty, Injustice, and Impiety of the Pagans in offering them up, are to this Day remember'd with the greatest Abhorrence and Aversion.

An. It doth by no Means follow from hence, that the true God hath not Power to receive Sacrifice for Sin ; even natural Religion as well as revealed allows the common Mortality of Mankind, to be a just Punishment inflicted on them by God for their Sins, that it is for them they justly die, and that they are the justifiable Cause of their Death : And if so, then the Sacrifice of one Christ, on that account, cannot be unjust ; and God may as well receive the Attonement of Christs death for Sins, as the Death of all Mankind. And the Procedure of God is as justifiable in one Instance, as the other.

Obj. The Attonement made by *Jesus Christ* likewise represents God, as punishing the Innocent, and acquitting the Guilty.

An. This is a great Mistake, for altho' God pardons them thro' the Merits of that Attonement ; yet he doth it not without calling them to a severer Repentance for Sin, than Nature can possibly charge on them : Nor doth he shew his Dislike of the Sin-

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ner,

ner, or Approbation of the Guilty thereby, since his Merits only can recommend their Repentance. And as to the Fitness and Reasonableness of the Sacrifice of Christ, whether or no it is the true Means of attoning for Sin; Reason can no more discover it, than any other of our Sences. Since the Fitness of such Means must result from the incomprehensible Relation between God and his Creatures, so what Worth and Dignity it is necessary that such an Attonement shou'd have, must be above our Comprehension. Nor can the supernatural Means of Attone-ment be perfectly revealed to our Senses, as it is in its own Nature, otherwise it would not be Supernatural, or above our Capacities; but it must be reveal'd to us, by comparing it to such Things as we have already an Idea of, and applying the Terms of the Matter which we know, to that of which we know nothing at all, which teaches us to believe something as useful to us, of that incomprehensible Matter, as we know of that by which it is represented.

Thus the revealed manner of Christs existence in Heaven, with respect both to God and his Creatures, can't be truly represented to us, as it is in itself, by the Term intercessor, any more than Gods Goodness can be represented to us by human Goodness; so it is revealed to us, that he is in Heaven as our Intercessor, because

cause he is as beneficial to us, as Intercessors are beneficial to Men, and that he is our Attonement, because he is as beneficial to us, as Attonements are beneficial to Men. So that after full Satisfaction given, yet all may be Mercy and pure Forgiveness, for altho' the Attonement of Christ bears some Resemblance to Attonements among Men; yet it signifies a great deal more in the former Sense.

Obj. There are certain eternal and unalterable Reasons and Relations of Things, and moral Fittests resulting from them, independent of God, according to which he is to act; otherwise he can't be a wise and good Being: Which Reasons, as they are independent on the divine Will oblige not only Mankind, but even God himself, to act according to them.

An. This is laying too great a Restraint upon the infinite Power and Knowledge of God, as if he were oblig'd to know and act in such a Manner as we shall think fit to prescribe him. But we have no more Reason to enquire into, or define the Manner of Gods knowing and acting all Things, than we have to prescribe the Method of his being eternal. His Wisdom, Goodness, and Power can no more be ascribed to any Cause, than his Existence and Eternity,

yet our uncertainty on what the Wisdom, and Goodness, and existence of God are founded, or to what they are owing, don't lessen the Certainty we have of his real Existence. God is the Creator of all Things, so their Relations must owe their Existence to his Wisdom and Will, as the Things themselves do to his Power ; therefore his Commands can no more be independent on any eternal Relations of Things, than his Power can be on the eternal Existence of his Creatures, for Things could not have any Relations, or exist in any particular manner before they existed at all, and as no Things eternally existed, so there can be no eternal and unalterable Relations of Things ; which, as well as their Reasons, depend on the Will of God : And as his Omnipotence acted suitably to itself in the Creation of all Things, so will his Wisdom and Will in giving Laws, but then his Wisdom and Will in so doing, can't be the Effects of, or founded on the Reasons of Things, more than his Existence can be no the Effects of the Things themselves. As therefore no Things eternally and unalterably exist, so there can be no eternal and unalterable Reasons and Relations of Things.

Obj. The Law of Nature being perfect and Imutable, God can't add too, or diminish from it, therefore he can't command
any

any Thing by Revelation, which hath not a Foundation in the unalterable Reasons and Relations of Things, and the Fitnesses resulting from them.

An. It must be confess'd, that in this Sense, the Law of Nature is Imutable, that is, that God wills not any Thing but what is right and fit, or repugnant to that Law; but if the several Beings related are not imutable, then these Relations, and the Fitnesses resulting from them can't be so, nor the Duties they are to perform; but if the Law of Nature be understood to be such a Rule of Duty as every Person is capable of forming for himself from the Nature of Things, then that Law must vary, as each Persons particular Judgment or Capacity varies: And it is to be consider'd, that there are several States and Conditions in which we may consider Man, with Respect to each of which, his Capacity and Judgment must vary, and they are either a State of Innocence, in which his Affections and Abilities were pure and incorrupt, in which his Scheme of Duty was very large, and no Abatement could be pleaded from it, yet possibly he might offend in a great Degree, being not infallible at the best, and he hath in Fact done so, and brought upon himself a second State, which is a State of Guilt; these two States require
different

different Duties, for that Repentance and Sorrow for Sin, and Resolutions of Amendment, which is necessary in the latter State, could not be required in the Former, in a State of Happiness and Glory, our Duties will still be altered, both ourselves, and our Relations to our Fellow Creatures. Being so altered, several Duties as Faith, Temperance, Liberality, &c. must cease in that State, which are incumbent on us in this; so we see there are no such Things as Duties arising from any eternal and immutable Reasons of Things, since the Reasons and Relations themselves are not immutable,

Obj. God must act arbitrarily in giving us such positive Commands as are not founded in the Nature and Reasons of Things; and it is not in our Power to love the Deity while we consider him to be an arbitrary Being, acting *out of Humour and Caprice.*

An. It must be granted that God cannot impose on his Creatures any Commands, which have not a Tendency to promote real Virtue and Happiness among them, that were to suppose him not to be what he is, wise, just, and good, &c. yet he may impose on them such positive Institutions as are subservient, and assisting to Virtue, such as are not inconsistent with the Law of Nature, altho' not directly commanded by it; even human Legislators,

Legislators, whom we esteem to have been the Wifest, have sometimes impos'd on their Subjects, positive Institutions, the better to secure the practice of real and substantial Religion, and with much more Reason and Justice may the Almighty supreme Lawgiver do so. What can be more reasonable, than that he should impose such Institutions, as are to the different States and Conditions of his Creatures, and it hath been shewn that they have been very different.

Again, he that made all Things out of nothing, can have nothing to oppose his Will; or to encline him to do one Thing more than another : Therefore it is impossible that he should be an arbitrary Being, and act with the greatest Freedom and Independence; but it does not follow from hence, that he acts out of Humour and Caprice, which supposes Weakness in the Will, but the Will of God is all perfect, having nothing sufficient or able to direct him, he being the Author of all Perfection; and if his Will must be as perfect as all his other Attributes, it is impossible he should Will any Thing amiss, or need any Direction; it is therefore a Contradiction in Terms to suppose him acting out of Humour or Caprice, and without Reason, since what he Wills can only be fit and reasonable, because he Wills it, and no Obligation can arise from the Nature of Things independent

independent of the Will of God, more than an Obligation to religious Worship without his Will, which adds such particular Circumstances to Things, which in themselves have no absolute Fitness, to make them Obligatory, but we shall speak more largely of positive Institutions in our 3d Chapter.

Obj. If there is nothing right or wrong antecedently and independent of the Will of God, there can then be no Reason why God should Will or Command any one Thing rather than another.

An. All Goodness and Perfection, being eternally and essentially inherent in God can neither be said to be antecedent, or dependent of him ; and we can no more find any cause or source of the Divine Goodness, besides the divine Nature, than we can of any other of God's Attributes. The same may be said of all Physical Relations and Qualities in Bodies, as likewise of all moral Qualities and Obligations ; and nothing can be said to be right and good in either, but what began when the Bodies or the Relations began to exist in such a State and Condition of Life. So that the absolute Fitness of Actions, or Things independent of the Will of God, are mere chimerical Notions, and put the Actions both of God
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and Man, under such Law, is most extravagant and wild, for 'tis supposing God to be in the same State, and under the same Law, and consequently in the same rank and order with his Creatures.

Obj. The reason of Things is the same Law to God, that it is to us, for our Reason for Kind, tho' not for Degree, is the same with that of God.

An. This is a very great Absurdity, as supposing a dependent and independent, eternal and temporary, and that their Faculties and Powers being, are the same in Kind. Our Reason can no more be of the same kind with that of God, than our Power, Existence, Life, and Happiness; but it is confess'd on all Hands, that our Happiness and Reason are limited, whereas those of God are unlimited, which is proof enough that they can't be of the same Kind; tho' our Reason, as must be confess'd, as our Power, bears some likeness to those of God, but with an infinite Difference from them, in so much that we are unable to define either, much less to discover the Nature of the infinite Knowledge and Power of God.

Obj. The divine Attributes, tho' they are different from the Qualities and Faculties of
F Men

Men in their manner of Existence, yet are the same in Nature and Essence.

An. Yet if there be any such Difference in the Manner of their Existence, it must follow, that there is the same Difference in Nature and Essence, the Nature and Essence being the same with the Manner of the Existence of any Thing, so that in both Ways there must be supposed an infinite, unconceivable and unmeasur'd Difference, since there is no other Nature of any Thing than its manner of Existence, it is of small significance to say which Way they differ, so that an Agreement or Difference in one, must imply the same in the other.

Obj. But if the divine Attributes are *toto genere*, distinct and different from those Qualities and Perfections which we esteem Perfections in ourselves, how shall we discover what that kind of Qualities God prefers before the contrary, how can we be certain, that these in particular are agreeable to him, or how shall we hope or endeavour to make ourselves like him ?

An. There is the same Difficulty in resolving this Question, divine Attributes, by supposing them different from the Qualities of Men, in their Manner of Existence, as is in

in supposing them different in the Nature and
 Essence, as appears by what has been said.
 The plain Answer is, that there is some
 Likeness of each to the other, tho' with an
 infinite Difference; the Power, Goodness,
 and Wisdom of Men, being like those of God,
 as all can produce Effects, tho' those of God
 have such an infinite Reality and Perfection
 in them, as tho' of a transcendently higher,
 and different Nature from ours, are not to
 be communicated to us, so as to assure us of
 their Existence and of our Reasons to
 admire and adore them.





C H A P II.

*Of the Origin of the Law, or Religion
of Nature, of its Perfection, and
Distinction from Revelation.*

Obj. **I**F God from the Beginning gave Men a Religion, that Religion must be most Perfect, and a Religion absolutely Perfect, is incapable of Addition, or Diminution; and the Christian Religion, being the only true, and absolutely perfect Religion, was what God from the Beginning design'd for all Mankind; so that the Name Christianity be a Name of latter Date, it must be as old and as extensive as human Nature, and natural Religion and revealed, must necessarily be one and the same, and *differ only in the manner of their being communicated.*

An. This is a plain Objection against the Usefulness of any Revelation whatsoever: For if the Law of Nature be a perfect Rule of Conduct,

Conduct, then Christianity must be a mere useless Institution. To which I answer, First, That since God has delivered to us several positive Institutions; *i. e.* such as exclusive of his] Command, have no Reason either Moral or Natural for their Performance; and since natural Religion can't contain any Precepts, but such as have; it follows that natural and reveal'd Religion, must be different, and God's delivering his Revelation to the World, containing such Institutions supposes, or rather is a manifest Proof, that natural Religion is not absolutely Perfect, or a sufficient Rule for the Conduct and Government of human Life without it. But as I intend to treat of positive Institutions in the next Chapter by themselves, I shall proceed to a more particular Answer of the Matters contained in this Objection. And first, the Religion of Nature, according to the former Definition of it, must be allowed to proceed from God, and as all their Blessings do, for the attainment of which he hath furnish'd us with proper Means and Abilities, and no otherwise: *i. e.* he hath furnish'd Man with Reason to discover a certain Rule or Law for the Direction of his Actions. But the Law as it proceeds from the Exercise of the Faculty of our Reason, can be said to be no more perfect than Reason itself is; but as Reason cannot be said to be absolutely Perfect,

Perfect, so it cannot be said that the Law or Religion which it discover is so. If we consider the Law of Nature in the latter of the two Notions which I have mentioned, it is indeed a perfect Law, and would have sufficiently justified Men in the Sight of God, if they had liv'd up to its Precepts. But we are to consider Men in two different States, to each of which the Law is adapted, the one of Innocence, wherein he was made by the Creation, in which his reasoning Faculties were pure and incorrupted, altho' not absolutely Perfect. The other, *i. e.* the second State of Corruption, in which his Reason, his Understanding, his Will, and all his Faculties were deprav'd and polluted, both by original and actual Sins, with respect to the former State of Man; the Law of Nature in the former Sense of it, is indeed Perfect in relative Sense; *i. e.* it was exactly suited to the Nature of Man, and those Degrees of Reason which they enjoy'd, was sufficient to have instructed us in all the Duties which God required of us, and therefore sufficiently conducive to the Attainment of all that Happiness our Nature was capable of, because it was no farther obligatory to reasonable Beings, than as they were capable of comprehending it. So that had our Faculties been contracted, or enlarged by the Author of our Nature, the Duties comprehended under the Law of Nature,

Nature, would be proportionably contracted or enlarg'd; in this Sense, therefore, the Law of Nature was Perfect, as it always bore an exact Proportion to our Reason, and enjoyn'd no other Duties than it was capable of discovering; and was so far, as a Law, Obligatory to us, as it may be comprehended by our Reason, as it is perfectly sufficient to answer that end which was proposed by it, by the Author of our Nature, *i. e.* the Glory of God, and the Happiness of Man; and according to which, if Men had regulated their Lives, it would no doubt, but have rendered them sufficiently acceptable to God, but it is not absolutely Perfect, because it may be contracted or enlarg'd according to the Degrees of Reason, which those Beings enjoy. And the Law of Nature in its latter, most comprehensive Sense, is more perfect for Man in his State of Innocence, than in that of Corruption, to whom it is a Law. Thus the Law of Nature, or Religion, which Angels are supplied to exercise, must be much more perfect than that of Man, in Proportion to the Degrees of Reason which they enjoy above Mankind; and as it is a Law or Religion to these, it cannot be absolutely perfect, because it does not comprehend every Thing proper to be done by all rational Beings.

But if we consider Man in his corrupted degenerate State, since his Fall from original

nal Purity, the Law of Nature, in the former Sense of it, will be found then to be an insufficient, *therefore, in that Sense, an imperfect Law*, to promote the Glory of God, and the Happiness of Man.

Obj. But if the Law of Nature be in that Sense imperfect, will it not follow, that God has not sufficiently provided for the Happiness of all his Creatures?

An. The Law of Nature was sufficient of itself, and God in giving it, did sufficiently provide for the Happiness of Man; so that on his Part, it wanted no excellency whatever, to supply any Deficiency that could be found in it, to preserve Man in his State of Innocency in which he was fram'd at the Beginning; *i. e.* it was duly suited to his reasonable Nature, in order to the compleating his final Happiness; which Law, had it been strictly observed, would have rendered us sufficiently acceptable to God. Yet, altho' the Lawgiver had done his Part, in giving Man a sufficiently perfect Law, Reason sufficient for the full comprehending, and Power sufficient to perform all the Duties it required: Yet, Man fell from his original Purity, by transgressing that Law, incurr'd the Penalty annexed to the Breach of it, and so rendered it insufficient to attain the end proposed

proposed by it, and in this Sense an imperfect Law, for it could not, according to the Tenor of it, when Man had incurr'd the Penalty due to the Breach of it, find a Way to save them from that Penalty, and as it was insufficient to instruct Men in their Duty, in order to restore them to the Favour of God, from their fallen State, to a State of Happiness which they had lost by Sin, it became necessary that some other Provision should be made to free them from that Condemnation which they had thereby incurr'd, and this is no Reflection upon the Maker, or the Compleatness of the Law, as if this were any Addition to supply its Defects.

Thus the Law of Nature, altho' it was at the Beginning a perfect Law, and is still so, on the Part of the Lawgiver; yet, afterwards, it became imperfect, with Respect to those subject to it; and upon this fallen State of Man, the Necessity of a Divine Revelation is founded; for with Respect to that, this Law is deficient on several Accounts, and first in Point of Clearness, it not being plain and clear to all, neither as to its Precepts, nor Doctrines which are to enforce them. But it is clear, or obscure to different Men, according to their various Capacities, or Manners in which they have been educated, self evident, Principals, such as these. It is every Man's Duty to act whatever tends to the Honour of God; his

own Happiness, and the good of his Fellow-Creatures. Such as these, I say, are indeed, plain and clear to all, but not such as depend upon them by a long Train of reasoning, for we are not capable of knowing what is at all Times conducive to these ends, there may be several Relations in which we stand to our Fellow-Creatures, and which we may be ignorant off, and of course will be of the several Duties resulting from them, as appears from the many Errors into which Men have ran, both with Respect to Precepts, and Doctrines; and for Instance, there are several Facts, which under the Light of the Gospel, are accounted criminal, as Self-Murther, Theft, and exposing of Infants, which by those we were directed by the mere Light of Nature, were not only practis'd, but defended as lawful Actions.

Indeed, as to those social Duties which we owe each other, comprehended under that general Law of loving one another, the Evidence of them may be clear enough by the Light of Reason, but 'tis not so clear how far we are obliged to advance in our observance of them, when it may endanger our Lives for the good of our Neighbour. There are likewise many Points of Morality which are more clear to the same Persons, as they encrease in Years, and study, they shall improve their Understanding; the Consequence of which, is, that there is a difference

difference of the same Persons, from themselves at different Times, and for the same Reason, of different Persons, in the Degrees of their natural Knowledge, and those of weaker, as well as those of the most cultivated Judgment, are Subjects of the Law of Nature.

If it be alledged here, that all Men have the Means of Knowledge, sufficient for the Circumstances they are in; I grant it, and God will deal with Men, according to the Means and Opportunities which they enjoy; but this Objection supposes a Difference in the Knowledge of Men, and that all are not capable of knowing every Thing fit to be known; and even those wise Philosophers of the most refined Parts and Understandings, have much differed from each other, a manifest Proof that the Law of Nature is not absolutely plain and clear to all Men; or at least, that those Points in which they have differed, are matters of much Intricacy, and admit of great Dispute; and so far as any one differed from any sound Doctrine which another taught; so far his natural Light, or Law of Nature was deficient. And indeed, Experience sufficiently confirms this Truth, concerning the Deficiency of the Light of Nature, by which we find, that the Vulgar and Illiterate are greatly in the Dark as to these Matters, and borrow much of their Knowledge from sacred Writ.

Again

Again, the Sanctions of Rewards and Punishments of this Law of Nature, are not absolutely perfect, as not having Force sufficient to influence our Wills, and ballance against all Temptations to evil. Those which are the natural Consequences of our good or wicked Actions are so remote from the Causes, that the necessary Consequences of them are not so readily discern'd. I mean the Diseases and other Evils which attend our Sins; and those which are intended to bind us to the Duties we owe to God and our Neighbours, or to deter us from offending them, are too slight to ballance against the Force of Temptations, to sin against those Laws, for in the Transgression we often find an immediate Advantage, and the Punishment very remote, and distant from it, and as for natural Light, it affords us no other than a very uncertain Account of a future State of Rewards and Punishments. Which, however, clear to these Philosophers who advanced the Doctrines, are not so to all the World; so far from it, that the wisest of them seemed to be in some distrust of the Matter. So that all the best of their Knowledge amounted to little more than a comfortable Hope, of what might happen; nor could it be otherwise, since the very Foundation of such a future State, was uncertain; *i. e.* the Distinction of the Soul from the Body, its being conscious of what happens

happens in another Life, and its receiving good or ill, according to what we act in the present.

These Sanctions may indeed be sufficient to enforce Obedience, when the Temptations are slight, but if they urge strongly, the Case will be very different, when our adherence to the Rules of Virtue, may occasion our loss of all. The Blessings of this Life, and even Life itself, so small an Assurance as the Light of Nature can afford us of future Rewards, if notwithstanding the Temptations, we do adhere to those Rules of Virtue, or Punishments, if we do not, it will not be a sufficient Ballance for the present certain Loss which we shall sustain by our Obedience or Advantage by our Disobedience.

Again, the Law of Nature is imperfect, because it doth not afford the most suitable Means for the improvement of Virtue, all Men are naturally prone to evil, and we find no Way of accounting for this Truth, i. e. how Man was created after God's own Image, should be so prone to evil, as to have fallen from his original Purity; but by having Recourse to the Holy Scriptures, altho' Heathen Writers, in all Ages, agree, that there has been such a Fall of Man from his original Purity and Perfection, but Reason informs us, not how we shall make our Peace with that Being which we have offended by
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the Commission of evil ; or how, thro' our natural Corruption, to perform future Obedience : As to Sacrifices and Repentance, it cannot assure us of any Validity there is in either. Reason, indeed, acknowledges that we have incurr'd by our Sins, the Displeasure and the Supreme Being, who hath a right to govern us, and so prepares the Way for Repentance and Amendment of Life for the Time to come, but neither does such an Acknowledgment, nor Repentance, nor Amendment, atone for Sins past ; however, they may work a Reformation in us, and enable us to pay the present Debt of Obedience. And altho' Men might hope from the Goodness of God, some kind of Remission of what is past on future Amendment, yet they cannot be assur'd of obtaining it, by reason that a present Obedience pays no more than what is due, and the Discharge of a present Debt, will not pay off our past Arrears, more than it will in the Affairs of Men. And indeed, we have Reason to think, that God will not restore the Sinner to Favour, on account of future Obedience ; his infinite Wisdom, and the Vindication of the Honour and Authority of his Laws requiring, that howsoever he may be enclined of his infinite Mercy to forgive the Sinner, that he should punish Offenders, unless he positively declar'd that he does accept their Repentance, as an Attonement for
their

their Sins; for, however, Men may, by ceasing from Sin, recommend themselves to the Favour of God; yet as they have contracted a Guilt, they are obnoxious to his Displeasure for what is past, because the Pollution and Guilt of the Sin remains on them, altho' it be past, and if Pardon must be the necessary Consequence of that Repentance, then no Criminal whatsoever, can be in Justice punished. If it be reply'd, that Punishment ought not to be inflicted in the End of it; i. e. the Reformation of Sinners is obtained, that being the only End for which it is or can be inflicted, for whether God rewards or punishes us, 'tis only for our good: Therefore Repentance and Amendment must of themselves procure us Pardon, without the Punishment of the Offender. I answer, that Punishment is inflicted, not only for the Reformation of the Offender, but likewise to prevent his future Relapse into Sin; and in case the Sinner should repent and amend, it doth not follow but that he may again Relapse. So that the End of Punishment is to prevent such his Relapse, which must be inflicted till that end be obtained, which repentance cannot do; therefore Repentance cannot assure us of Pardon, by Reason it cannot prove but what we may again relapse; Yet further, I deny that Reformation is the only end of Punishment; there are other ends of it; i. e. the good of the Publick, the
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Terror of others, and the supporting of the Grandeur of the civil Government ; so that the Law of Nature is in this Sense imperfect, because it affords no encouragement to those Virtues of Repentance and Sorrow for Sin, and Resolutions of Amendment, and to the vigorous Endeavours of the Sinner to reform and amend. But there remains one more Objection still to be answered, and that is.

Obj. The Law of Nature is the Test of the Perfection of every other Law, and therefore, must itself be perfect.

An. It must, indeed, be allowed to be such a Test, but it is not so in an absolute Sense, for it cannot judge whether or no, a Law delivered by the Supreme Authority, be in itself fit or unfit, nor hath it Power to receive or reject any Law as such : So far only it is a Test, to judge whether or no the Authority by which it is delivered, be sufficient to enforce Obedience ; so far can Reason proceed, and no farther ; and however mysterious and incomprehensible the Laws themselves may be to our Reason, yet if we are assured that they are divine, we are oblig'd to embrace them, and to reject them no otherwise, than as we are satisfied that they are not divine. In this therefore the Law of Nature is a perfect Test ; *i. e.* so far as it
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is a proper Judge of the Sufficiency of the external Evidence of any Revelation, and it is so, to every Man, altho' he be of the meanest Capacity ; yet, as I have prov'd that it is of a much greater Extent to some than to others, and may be enlarged or diminished, according to the different Degrees of Reason which Men enjoy ; it cannot be an absolutely perfect Law, briefly since the Law of Nature is in several Respects an imperfect Law, in particular since it cannot discover, or at least clearly discover, all the Relations in which an infinite Creator stands to his Creatures, at least, since it cannot so clearly discover all the Relations in which an infinite Creator stands to his Creatures, or all those in which the Creatures stand to each other, and of Course, the several Duties which are founded upon them, which, yet a Revelation may discover, or clear up better, or save us the Pains of making these several Searches and Deductions, or, make the Knowledge we obtain by our Pains more perfect. Again, since Revelation may put us in a sure Method of Reconciliation with God, when we have incurr'd his Displeasure, by the Violation of his Precepts, which natural Reason cannot do, altho' it may give us Assurance of Acceptance upon our Obedience, natural and revealed Religion must certainly be different ; but all the Difference

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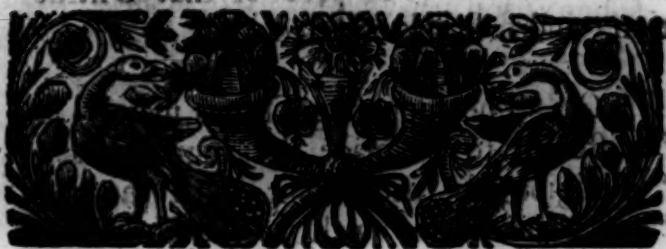
will not be a Difference of Contrariety; *i. e.* Revelation makes a fuller and clearer Discovery of the several Relations of Things, and their proper Fitness, than Reason can do. They are one, as whatever is contain'd in natural Religion, is contained likewise unrevealed, but different, as whatever is comprehended in Revelation, is not in natural Religion; yet this Difference does not amount to an Opposition, or Contradiction, any more than new Laws made by the civil Powers, to explain and amend the former, can be said to be contradictory to, or destructive of them. They differ likewise, in Efficacy, as to the Sanctions of both, and the Discovery of the proper Means of Reconciliation with God, upon our transgressing his Laws. They differ likewise in the Manner of their being communicated to us, for the former is a Discovery made by Men, in the Use and Exercise of their Faculties, whereas we receive the latter, by the express Declaration of a Divine Person, sent by God, on Purpose to declare his Will to us, altho' what they have asserted, that the Law of Nature comes from God, supposes that God immediately upon the Creation of Man, either in Person, or by an express Messenger, communicated to him a Rule of Duty.

Lastly,

Lastly, the very Supposition of a Revelation having actually been given to the World, supposes that it must necessarily be different from natural Religion; for, since a Revelation was actually given to the World, and it is allowed that Man in his State of Innocency, stood in no Need of it; it follows that there must afterwards have happened some change in the State and Condition of Men, which made a Revelation necessary; since Nature, or the Author of it, does nothing in vain, which change was the Ground of a new Revelation. It follows, therefore, that natural Religion may, or rather must be different from Revelation; for otherwise, there had been no manner of Necessity of believing a Revelation at all; if it taught nothing but what that taught. And the Case is this, altho' in the uncorrupt State of Man, natural Religion was a sufficient Guide for him, yet by Reason of the Corruption which they brought upon themselves, it became insufficient, and made some farther help for them absolutely necessary. So that in this Sense, Christianity is as old as the Creation; that natural Religion, which is as old as the Creation, is confirm'd by Revelation, comprehended under it, and so far, the same with it, but not in the proper acceptation of the Assertion; *i. e.* that Chri-

stianity as such, and on account of the Reason why it is so denominated, is not more extensive, more clear, and, in some Respects, more effectual than natural Religion, to affirm which is gross Infidelity.





C H A P. III.

God has an undoubted Right to impose on his positive Precepts, prov'd from his Sovereign Authority over Mankind, and from other Reasons, but chiefly, their Usefulness. A Recital of some particular Institutions delivered to the Patriarchs, &c.

THIS 3d Chapter is naturally placed after the former, which I intend shall contain in it, a Difference of the Lawfulness and expediency of God's imposing upon Men, positive Institutions; for altho' in the former, I have sufficiently proved the Distinction between natural and revealed Religion; yet whatever proves this Point, will be a farther Confirmation of what has been

been offered there in proof of that Distinction, and first it is objected, that,

“Obj. The supposing Things merely indifferent to be made the Ingredients of Religion, is inconsistent with the good of Mankind, as well as the Honour of God.”

And such are mere arbitrary Impositions, which have no Relation to the End for which God created us; for he cannot deal with Men as rational Creatures, but by proposing Arguments to convince their Understanding, and influence their Wills, in the same Manner as if proposed by their Agents, for to go beyond this, would be confounding Mens Reason and Liberty of chusing.

An. In answer to which, First, I affirm that it is certain, God may give us positive Precepts, without making us passive, and destroying our Liberty of chusing, whether or no these Precepts depend on his Will, and have no other Reason for their Observance, whether natural or moral; *i. e.* are neither in themselves virtuous, or any Way tending to promote our temporal Interest, but purely indifferent exclusive of his Command, altho' his Command makes them change their Nature, and become most necessarily and indispensibly obligatory, whether or no they are really so, or are founded in the Nature
and

and Reason of Things; and this he may do, by Virtue of his Sovereign Authority and absolute Dominion over us, he being the Supreme Lord of his Creatures, yet he does not herein, act arbitrarily, and without Reason; for altho' there be not a particular Reason for this or that Thing, which is the Subject of his Commands; yet in those Cases there is always a general Reason for laying some Commands upon us, either for the Exercise of our Obedience, or where several Actions are conducive to one and the same end, convenient or necessary to be obtain'd, and there is a Reason for commanding one of them, and it is indifferent which, and there is no Reason, perhaps, (or at least, which we can discern) for the Preference of one before the other, as will appear in the Instances hereafter to be produc'd. My Reasons are, because where something is necessary to be determined, and it be indifferent which; either God may command one, or they are none of them indifferent; *i. e.* whichsoever cannot be commanded is not so, but absolutely unlawful: And besides, if an indifferent Action may be performed without a Command, it does not become unlawful being commanded, and the Performance of it is rather an expression of our Obedience and Submission to the divine Will, in which alone all Religion consists; which therefore we should be obliged to perform, altho'

altho' no Reason, but the Command itself were assign'd for our Obedience. For consider but the Absurdity of the contrary Assertion, *i. e.* that nothing can become to us proper matter of Duty, the Reason and Fitness of which we cannot comprehend, and then neither hath subordinate Powers a right to command any such Thing; and so every Man's own Reason will become to him the proper Measure of his Obedience, both to the Commands of God, and of the civil Power, but it is allow'd that our temporal Superiors have this Power of determining in such Matters, then much more hath God; nor indeed can these Precepts be delivered so advantageously by human Superiors, as by God himself, because the former may be subject to human Errors, whereas God must be an infallible Judge of the best Ceremonies to be us'd, in the Performance of his Worship.

Again, if Things indifferent cannot be commanded or forbidden, then no Man has Power to make any private Choice in Things indifferent; for if they determine either Way, they must deviate from the Rules of Fit and Right, which is most effectually to deprive Men of the Liberty of their Wills, so God may not only forbid any Thing that is evil, or command any Thing that is good; but he may command or forbid any Thing that is indifferent, and when it is so commanded

manded or forbidden, then it ceases to be indifferent; and there may be Reasons as well for commanding or forbidding these, as the other; which, altho' they be not strictly moral, as appears by what has been already said, may be prudential, and therefore, sufficient to determine the Mind of God.

Obj. It must impair very much the Happiness of Man to deprive him of his Liberty, by prescribing to him in Things indifferent.

An. To lay Injunctions upon Men in Things indifferent, in some Cases, may be very necessary; i. e. such, wherein the Things commanded, tend to promote the honour of God and our own Happiness, and are advantagious upon several Accounts; for the Improvement of Virtue, or some temporal Advantages, and the Satisfaction of Liberty, in such Cases, to act contrary to the Commands, must be very small; nor indeed, are the Things at all indifferent, when commanded by God, but proper Subjects of our Obedience, when known, and the more we know, the greater Obligations we lie under in point of Duty; but we are not therefore, wilfully to neglect any Means or Opportunity of informing ourselves in the Will of God, for fear of enlarging our Obligations. For, as the more we know, the more

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Obligations

Obligations we lie under to the Performance of our Duty ; so the larger the Extent of our Duty, and the more strictly we perform it, the greater Degrees of Glory will be our Portion hereafter. But if these Commands which are Trials of our Obedience, serve to improve our Virtues, then to neglect them is to oppose the Interest of those Virtues which they are design'd to support ; it has, moreover, been objected, that we may be overcharg'd with positive Precepts, and so should not be at Leisure to attend to Matters of strict Morality, and that to lay too much Stress upon positive Precepts, is a Means of introducing Superstition, but this is rather an Argument drawn from the Abuse, than the right Use of those Precepts. It is a Proof that Men often look upon those Precepts which are merely human, as Divine. But we must consider, that whatever wrong Use Men may make of positive Institutions, yet a right Use of them is absolutely necessary, as well to promote outward Order and Decency in the Church, as inward and sincere Piety and Holiness.

Obj. If God be unchangeable both in his Nature and his Decrees, then no Command which did not always oblige, can be impos'd on us by him, for to suppose it might, must suppose for the same Reason, a changeableness in the Mind of God.

An.

An. The general Duties which we owe to God, are, indeed, unchangeable, but yet he may superadd other Duties as Proofs of them, or it would not have been in his Power to do any Thing new ; for if he did, it must, according to this Argument, prove God to be immutable ; and thus we should deprive him of the Power both of Creation and Providence in all its Dispensations. Since there must be the same Reason from all Eternity for performing those Effects, the Truth is, God might have will'd those Works from all Eternity, and fix'd upon a certain particular Time for the accomplishment of them ; and this is no Proof of his being immutable. Moreover, as the Reasons and Circumstances of Affairs alter, so God may change his Resolution, and alter the particular Precepts, which he delivers us ; and this varying and adding to his Laws, as the various Circumstances and Conditions of his Creatures require ; is so far from discovering in the Almighty a fickle and changeable Disposition ; that on the contrary, it is rather an Argument of the greatest Constancy and Immutability, and most agreeable to his infinite Wisdom and Goodness.

These various Institutions in Religion, have indeed, occasioned various Disputes and Quarrels in the World ; but the Occasion of them is accidental, and not to be imputed

to the nature of the Institutions themselves, which have been oppos'd upon a Presumption that they were not given by God, and wanting that divine Authority they pretended to, for had they been allow'd on all Hands to have been delivered by him, no Body would have oppos'd them, nor would ever any Quarrels or Disputes have risen concerning the Use of them: But it doth by no Means follow, that God cannot give us positive Precepts, because wicked Men have sometimes pretended his Authority to impose their Trifles upon the World as his Commands. To enable us to grow in Grace, and the Favour of God, to recommend and enforce more Power fully to us, such Rules of Conduct as are most fit to habituate and confirm in us, such pious Dispositions as are suitable to that End. This was the Use of most of the legal Institutions; they are proper, likewise, to guard us against falling into the abuse of such lawful Things, which have been generally abus'd, by prohibiting entirely the right Use of them; so that as the proper Use is lawful according to the Law of Reason; so a positive Institution is necessary to prevent the Use of them, lest they should be abus'd, Men being not only Ignorant, but often Negligent of what is fit, and reasonable for them to do, impatient, heedless, and liable to Temptations; which makes such positive Institutions useful,

useful, as well to instruct them what they are to do, as to enforce the Practice of those Instructions, by the Discovery of certain Rewards and Punishments on their Obedience or Disobedience, and in what Degree they are to be distributed. At what Time, and in what Manner, of this sort of Precepts, all Religions that ever yet subsisted in the World have consisted from that of the *Jews*, down to the *Mahometan*. As for that of the *Heathens*, it consisted mostly of such Ceremonies, insomuch that inward Piety, and true Religion, was entirely neglected by them. This, at least, is a certain Proof, that a Religion which came from God, might contain Precepts of a positive Nature, and that all Mankind allowed that it might, otherwise, those who forg'd any false Religion which contain'd such, would not have pretended to obtrude them on the World, as knowing that they contain'd in them such Precepts, as all Mankind knew could not possibly proceed from God.

In order to make out what has been here asserted, concerning the Usefulness and Expediency of positive Institutions, I shall instance in those in particular, which were delivered by God to all Mankind, in the several Ages of the World, and shew how properly some of them were adapted to the Purposes for which they were appointed.

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After the Apostacy of Man from God, a Covenant of Promise was made with *Adam*, that he and his Posterity should be restor'd to Mercy and Favour, which Covenant was renew'd with *Noah* and all the *Patriarchs*, to *David*, and was understood both by them and those who liv'd under the Law, as a Promise of Deliverance from the Curse of the Fall; and the Method which Providence took to support those Hopes in the World, was by the Appointment of outward Institutions, as First, Prayers, which included Thanksgiving, and Sacrifices to keep Men from the Infection of Sin, which had gotten Foot in the World, and to put them in Mind of that Covenant by which God had promised to restore Mankind; for without a positive Precept, these could not have been presum'd to have been Duties by the Law of Nature, not Sacrifice, because that Command intimates the contrary; i. e. be fruitful and multiply and replenish the Earth, and likewise the Prohibition given to *Noah's* Sons, from using any living Creatures for Food. Take in here the Supposition of Sacrifices, prefiguring Christ, and they must be very proper. But even setting it aside, their being appointed, as Means of Reconciliation, shews they must have been effectual for that End. Next to these, Circumcision was given to *Abraham*, after the Establishment of the Commonwealth among the *Jews*,
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the Passover was appointed, then the Sabbath with many external Observances, consisting of Meats, Drinks, divers Washings, and carnal Ordinances; weekly monthly, and yearly Festivals; with a particular Promise to the Letter, of every Thing that is desirable in this Life; Health, Peace, Plenty, and Victory over their Enemies, upon their Obedience to the Conditions of this Covenant, and the Curses denounc'd against them upon their Disobedience, was the Reverse of all these, which accordingly were fulfilled, as they were Obedient or Disobedient to them, and was agreeable to all these, the Sacrament of the Lords Supper was appointed among Christians.

As to Prayer, natural Light cannot suggest to us, since God knows our Wants, that we shall be heard ever the sooner for our Praying? For how shall we know by natural Light, but that in praying for any Thing (as all Things concern either this Life or a better) we may not possibly offend God? We are not sure but we may ask what is unfit for God to grant; even if with the *Lacedemonians*, we ask in general Terms for good and profitable Things; for possibly the Ills which we suffer, may be the just Punishments of our Sins; but take in the Covenant, in view of which God has appointed it, and we have Reason to hope our Obedience will be rewarded for the obtaining

ing Blessings, which otherwise we have no Reason to expect it? As to Thanksgiving, there is Reason to believe, that by natural Light it never would have been thought of.

That these Institutions have actually been practis'd by all People and Nations, is no Proof that they were the Inventions of Men, but rather the Contrary; for 'tis not to be conceiv'd that all People should agree in the same Contrivance, but by ascribing them to Revelation: We have a fair Account why they should be universally practis'd; and that is, because they might be propagated to all *Adam's* Posterity. Thus we see that the general Purpose of which all outward Institutions have been appointed, was to be as Memorials of God's Transactions with Man by his Covenants of Mercy and Grace, and are as Warnings to put them in Mind of the Benefits which they receive by it, and that it may lead us to pay a due Reverence to God, who instituted them, which would otherwise be entirely neglected, that these Institutions have been abus'd, is no Argument against the proper Use of them, since the best Provisions may be abus'd, and as bad as the World is at present; there is no Reason to doubt but that it would have been much worse, but for the outward Ordinances, and Institutions of Religion, thus it appears, with how little Reason; the outward Institutions

stitutions of Religion have been Branded with the Name of arbitrary Impositions, which have no Relation to the End, for which God created us, since they have a manifest Tendency that maintain in us a true Sense of Religion, and in Consequence of it, our Happiness. And this was the Effect it had among the *Jews*, that while the other Part of the World was over-spread with Idolatry, they were preserv'd free from the general Infection.





CHAP. IV.

*Whether or no a proper Rule of Life
be more easily discoverable to us in
the Use of our Reason, than the
Proof and Meaning of a Revelation ;
and whether or no God is oblig'd to
act in making known our Duty to us,
after human Methods.*

Obj. **B**UT supposing that we should submit ourselves to be govern'd by Revelation entirely, and not by that Law which God hath impress'd upon our Minds, yet a proper Rule of Life will be more easily discoverable to us in the Use of our Reason, than by any extraordinary Revelation from God, for these Reasons : First, it will require more Pains to understand the Proof and Meaning of that Revelation which depends upon very uncertain Evidences, and obscure Passages

Passages of Scripture, (or corrupted Passages,) than to discover a proper Rule of Life from the nature and reason of Things, because God is oblig'd when he reveals to us any Truth, to shew its agreement with Notions Self-evident, the general Tests of all Truths, which he cannot do by Revelation ; " for he cannot act upon our Minds, " but by proposing Arguments to convince " our Understandings, and influence our " Wills, in the same Manner as if propos'd " by other Agents. For to go beyond this, " would be making Impressions on Men as a " Seal does on Wax ; to the confounding " of their Reason and Liberty in chusing ; " for he can't make known to us our Duty, by Way of Revelation, by any such evident conviction of our Understanding, because of the Uncertainty and Obscurity of its Evidence.

An. This Objection consists of several Parts, each of which, I shall endeavour to answer in its turn.

Obj. And First, a proper Rule of Life is more easy discovered by Reason, than by Revelation.

An. This I deny, First, because supposing that a proper Rule of Life were perfectly discoverable to us in the mere use of our

Reason, exercised by inference of certain Rules and Precepts, provable according to their Agreement with Self-evident Notions; yet God can by some extraordinary, act upon our Mind, and make the same Discovery without the Intervention of our Reason in collecting it, *i. e.* by Inspiration; and then those who are so *inspired by Inspiration*, may communicate their Knowledge to others, of which we may be as certain, as if we were to collect the Knowledge of such inspir'd Truths, by infering them from their Agreement with Self-evident Principles.

There is no Contradiction in the Supposition of this Action, and it is therefore the Object of infinite Power, which may act upon our Minds, and impress Sentiments on them, as easily as cause Motion in Bodies; and yet supposing a proper Rule of Life to be discoverable by Reason, yet nevertheless, a Revelation will be useful in forwarding and assisting us in the Exercise of the Faculty of our Reason, to discover the Connection of many Truths, with Self-evident Principles, which Reason could not have done, or to make other Truths appear with more Plainness: As for the Proof and Meaning of a Traditionary Revelation, altho' 'tis altogether built upon Probability, yet a number of strong Probabilities joined together, will justify our Conduct as fully as to Faith and Practice, as Demonstration itself; especially,

especially, if such are the highest Evidence that the Nature of the Thing in Question will admit of.

Lastly, 'tis asserted in this Objection, as a Reason why a Rule of Life is more easily discovered by Reason than by Revelation, that God cannot inform us of his Will by Way of Revelation, because he cannot act upon our Minds, but by shewing the Agreement of any Truth, with Notions Self-evident, the general Test of all Truth which he cannot do by Revelation; or which is much the same; he cannot act upon our Mind but by proposing Arguments to convince our Understanding, and influence our Wills, in the same Manner as if propos'd by other Agents. To which I answer, First, This is confining the Power of God too much, as if he could act upon us no other Way but after the Manner of Men, in creating or — us, and allowing to weak Men, the same Power in both Respects with God, and supposing God to go beyond this, will be making Impressions upon Men as a Seal does on Wax, to the confounding of, &c.

But if we receive from God our Reason, Life, Liberty of Will and Understanding, and all our Powers and Faculties neither of these Ways, and yet they do not subsist without the continual Action of God upon them, which all Persons will allow; then
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he may act upon us without conforming himself to either of these Ways of acting.

Secondly, if God should inform us of his Will by Way of Inspiration immediately upon our Minds, then it must needs have the same Influence upon them, and be perceiv'd as clearly as if made by Way of Deduction ; he that perceives a Truth, never takes the Pains of examining it by first and Self-evident Principles. The same may be said of God's impressing upon us any Truth, and when he does so, he takes Care to inform us that it proceeds from him. Nor is he who learns a Truth by Inspiration, depriv'd of his Liberty of Choice, or is his Reason confounded, altho' he is passive in being inspir'd, for he may still exercise his Reason for the Discovery of the Truth of inspir'd Doctrines or Precepts, and what Foundation they have in the Nature and Reason, and may chuse to obey or disobey them. Thirdly, if we are to be argu'd into all Truths, by proving their Agreement with Self-evident Principles, then we must be assured of the Agreement of these Self-evident Principles with others ; and so of those, with others *in infinitum*, and we shall never arrive at the first Original of all. Fourthly, Again, we may rely upon the Authority and Veracity of God, and be certain that he will not deceive us, without his proposing Arguments to convince our Understandings, and
influence

influence our Wills, &c. or shewing the Agreement of the Truths he reveals with first and Self-evident Principles, we do on that of Men of good Characters, the Veracity of *Historians*, and the Wisdom and Justice of our Governors, to direct us both in Speculation and Practice, and in case that they were infallible, we might have as great Certainty of the Truth of what we learn from them, as of what we learn from God. Fifthly, Again, we may be ascertained of Truths, which carry with them sufficient Evidences of divine Authority, the same Reasoning holds good with regard both to speculative and practical Truths, and if God shall in any extraordinary Manner, assure us what is his Will, and deliver to us certain Rules of Practice, we may be as certain that we ought to conform ourselves to them, as if he were to urge us into Obedience, by shewing on what Principles of Reasons they are founded; nor does this our Conformity, in the least, confound our Reason, or deprive us of the Liberty of Choice, as has been shewn; and should the Reason of such Precepts be above our Comprehension, yet still we know that we proceed upon the most firm Ground, for it is in the highest Degree conformable to Reason, that we should submit to the Guidance of the divine Will.

Lastly,

Lastly, and so many Reasons as prove God's Authority to give us positive Institutions, without shewing what Foundation they have in the Nature of Things will be the same to prove his Authority, to reveal his Will to us, without proposing Arguments, &c. or shewing the Agreement of such Doctrines and Precepts with first, &c.





C H A P. V.

That the Law of Nature, without the Assistance of divine Revelation, is not a sufficient Rule of Duty to the wisest of Men, much less for those of the meanest Capacities; especially in our fallen State.

O B J E C T I O N.

 PROPER Rule of Life must be perfectly discoverable by all Persons, even those of the meanest Capacities: Yet I do not mean by this, that all should have equal Knowledge, but that all Men should have sufficient for the Circumstances they are in.

A N S W E R.

It must be confessed, what every Man is obliged to perform as his Duty, must be knowable by him: For none can be obliged to the Performance of what he is entirely incapable of knowing: But it does not from thence follow, that Persons of the meanest Capacities can discover every Thing fit to be known as a Rule of Action.

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And although Men, by acting according to the best of their Knowledge, may be justified; yet it does not follow from hence, that the Knowledge must comprehend every Thing fit and proper to be done. This Objection therefore, I shall endeavour to confute, First, from ordinary Experience, whence it appears, that such Persons, as are here mentioned, have no such quick Abilities of discovering every Thing fit and proper to be done; for commonly their Good or ill Conduct bears an exact Proportion to their Knowledge, if their Dispositions and other Circumstances be alike. The general Principles of Morality are indeed knowable by all Persons, but it does not follow, that those of the meanest Capacities are capable of tracing them thro', that infinite Variety of Conclusions which may be drawn from them, of perceiving immediately, and distinctly, the necessary Connection between these Principles and Conclusions, any more than one, who understands the Elements of *Euclid*, is capable of becoming as compleat a Mathematician as *Kepler*, or *Newton*.

SEVERAL famous Men have, indeed, confessed, that some Parts of Morality by a Person of quick Parts, and good Abilities, might be capable of Demonstration, and have made some Attempts that Way: (Mr. Woolaston

Woolaston in particular) and have thereby gained much Applause. Several Philosophers have busied themselves very much in drawing out Schemes of Morality ; and yet by the Light of Revelation may discover many of their considerable Defects. These are all manifest Proofs, that a perfect Scheme of Morality is scarcely to be made out by Men at all : Or if it were, yet, at least, it is not so easy and slight a Task as to be done by Persons of the meanest Capacities ; for had it been so, there had been no Occasion for taking such Pains in making such Discoveries ; and those who have made those Discoveries would not have been guilty of so many Errors as they have in their several Schemes, nor would those who have, with some Success, made Attempts this Way, have gained so much Applause, if they had done nothing but what might have been done by Persons of the meanest Capacities. But farther, the Objection is chargeable with an evident Contradiction : For if Men of the meanest Capacities must know all religious Matters ; than Men of the greatest Capacities can do no more ; so I cannot see what should distinguish one Man's Capacity from that of another. Therefore all Capacities must be alike of all People, be their Circumstances what they will.

OBJECTION.

GOD Almighty governs all his Creatures by the same Laws; he does not make one Law for one Capacity, and another Law for an other; therefore he does not give Men Laws, but he gives all Men the same Degree of Capacity of knowing them.

ANSWER.

GOD Almighty does not govern all Men by the same Laws, but each with different, according to their different Capacities, and Abilities of apprehending them, and of directing their Actions by them. It is likewise true, that the meaner Men's Circumstances, or Capacities are, the fewer Relations they will sustain, and therefore the fewer Duties will be incumbent upon them. But this is no Argument, why they should, on all Occasions be able to discover every Thing fit for them to do: Besides, those Relations in which Men stand to God and their Fellow-Creatures, and the Fitnesses, resulting from the Considerations of those Relations, are the same, with respect to all Sorts of People, be their Circumstances what they will.

OBJECTION.

THE Evidence of Revelation is built upon

on Probability ; whereas that of natural Religion may be demonstrated.

ANSWER.

ARGUMENTS founded upon the strongest Probabilities, (especially, if such are the highest Evidence that the Nature of the Thing in Question will admit of, for such Kind of Evidence comes very little short of Demonstration) will justify our Conduct, as to Faith and Practice, as fully as Demonstration itself, much more effectually than a Rule of Duty founded upon Reason, considering, that although it should be in itself capable of Demonstration, how few there be that are actually capable of demonstrating it in all its Parts.

It is true there have been many vain Pretences to Revelation, yet that is no Proof, that there is no such Thing as a true one ; but on the contrary, that there must be some true, otherwise, the several Persons who have advanced any Systems of Doctrine, as revealed, would not have insisted so strenuously that theirs was the true Revelation ; and the many Pretences to it, shews, at most, but the great Difficulty of forming a right Judgment of the true one, or the Indolence of Men, in not using proper Pains and Industry for what they might be capable of effecting, if they would
give

give themselves Time and Pains, to examine the Truth of such plain Facts and Reasonings, on which its Evidence depends, even of such Facts, concerning which, Men of ordinary Capacities are capable of judging in Matters relating to civil Life. Such as these, whether or no the Propagators of Christianity were illiterate Fishermen, and did on a sudden speak all Languages, whether or no they wrought wonderful Miracles in Confirmation of the Truths of Christianity, and even laid down their Lives for the Confirmation of the Truth.

ON the other Hand, to go through a long Train of close Reasoning, where the Arguments and Connections of one Thing with another are very perplexed, it requires greater Abilities to make Things out plain, than all Persons are Masters of.

OBJECTION.

SEVERAL Corruptions may have crept into several Passages, by which a Revelation is conveyed down to Posterity; so that it will be difficult to distinguish between those Corruptions, and the true Revelation.

ANSWER.

WE grant that there may be a Possibility

ty of such Corruptions, otherwise, if there were no Possibility of Error, our Evidence for a Revelation would not be probable, but absolute: But the Possibility of such corrupted Passages having crept into Books which contain a Revelation, is no Proof, that in Fact they have so done. If such Corruptions be not proved, our Evidence on the other Side for a Revelation will not be rendered invalid by the Supposition of such Possibilities.

IF any such Corruptions have been proved upon these Books, we readily give up such Passages, and lay no Stress upon them. And indeed, we may justly challenge the Proof of some Forgeries, since they have not been such as could have caused any material Difference in the Whole, to be a sufficient Demonstration of the Truth of the Revelation, because it is highly probable, that those who have taken the Pains to detect them, would have done it, if they could have found sufficient to have overthrown the Whole; but since they have not done it, 'tis plain that it could not be done at all: But on the other Hand, our Proofs, that no material Corruptions have happened, are these; that numerous Copies from the original Writings, which contain our Religion, were immediately dispersed Abroad, studied, read, translated into all Languages,
received

received by different Sects, who hated each other, and would have been glad to have exposed each other's Errors ; but since they have not discovered any material one, such as could affect the whole System in general, but all agree as to the main Points of our Religion, we must either conclude, that it is true, or that all those different Sects of People have conspired in Forgeries, and Corruptions. See *Dr. Conibare's Treatise*, pag. 317, &c. where this Matter is fully handled.

It is indeed granted to be a general Rule, as to Copies of any Records, that the farther they are removed from the Original, the weaker must be their Evidence; *i. e.*, a Rule which holds good in all judicial Matters, where the original Record is capable of being produced, and in such Cases, if they are not, the taking of Evidence at such a Distance, looks like Design and Contrivance, to pervert the Truth, and corrupt Matters, when a nearer may be had, with, perhaps, greater Ease. But the Case is otherwise, with respect to the Evidence of traditional Revelation. For even supposing it were never so true; yet the Original attested Copies are not so easily produced, as in judicial Matters. But supposing we should allow the Evidence of our Religion to be decreased in some Measure, by its Records being removed from the original Copies yet

yet the Decrease can be but small; for however difficult it may be to preserve such Records in a great Distance of Time, yet we have several Copies, in different Languages, not above the third or fourth Remove from the Original, which must betray or correct one another in case of any Corruption or Forgery.

OBJECTION.

BUT supposing that we should admit, that the Evidence of a Revelation is sufficiently strong, to what Purpose will the Use of it be, if the Difference of Languages, the curious figurative Ways of expressing Things, and our Ignorance of the Manners and Customs, &c. of the Ancients, shall render it impossible, so exactly to translate the original Records from their Writings, as shall make them perfectly understood in ours. In this Case, the Ignorant especially will be obliged to pin their Faith on People's Sleeves.

ANSWER.

FOR the Faithfulness of the Translation in general, we may depend upon the Honesty and Skill of the Translators; especially since there are many who are no Friends to our Religion, and would be glad to expose their Errors, if they had been guilty

of any. As for the Exactness of the Translation, it is sufficient that the Substance and Import of the Meaning be rendered, although not verbatim; and the general Meaning of the Writing, however Figurative: And as for every particular Figure, there is no Occasion that the Reader should understand it, if the Drift of the Writing itself be made plain: And as to the Expressions in the prophetical Parts, although they were not understood when the Prophecies were delivered, yet the Accomplishment of the Prophecies themselves cleared up those Difficulties. And although, for want of the Knowledge of some particular Circumstances, useful to the explaining them, at the Time when they happened, we cannot perfectly comprehend them, yet we know enough to confirm us in the great Articles which they were designed to support. In short, however difficult the Stile of the Scriptures may be, whether in their historical, poetical, or prophetical Passages; yet these Difficulties do not regard any Errors, but what would have been long since discovered if there had been any considerable enough to affect the Substance and Import of the Scriptures.

GENERAL Truths, and Precepts, which concern Men in all Ages, and Times, cannot be much affected by the particular Manners

acts of expressing them, or the particular Manners of any People; for the Sense of them may be rendered in any Language, and to any People.

WHAT if we should not be able to comprehend the Occasion of every Precept, Direction, or Reasoning being given, to what Custom, or Usage, or other Circumstances of the People to whom they were given they had respect, since we may sufficiently discover the Scope, and Import of each the End for which they were given, is sufficiently answered hereby.

THUS, for Instance, St. Paul reasons, being about to prove the Certainty of a general Resurrection. *If after the Manner of Men, I have fought with Beasts at Ephesus, what advantage it me?* We may know here well enough the Intent of the Apostle, although the Reasoning, from a particular Usage, is pretty far fetched. Therefore, if God may very clearly make known his Will to certain Persons by Way of Inspiration, and they may communicate it to others, and it may from them be propagated to Posterity, by Way of Tradition, in Writing; and the Meaning of such Tradition may be sufficiently understood by those who cannot well form a proper Rule of Life, by close Reasoning from the Nature of Things; and if in

Fact he hath done so, we are sure that such Tradition is the perfect Will of God. And then I conceive that the Proof and Meaning of a Revelation is easier discoverable, than a proper Rule of Life can be formed according to the Nature and Reason of Things.



CHAP.

stood by those who cannot well form a proper Rule of Life, by close Reasoning from the Nature of Things; and it is



C H A P. VI.

That the Ignorance and other Defects of human Nature, which the wisest of Men have betrayed, render a Revelation, necessary for the Discovery of perfect Rules of Duty; and that Revelation does not contradict, but unite with Reason in the making these Discoveries.

OBJECTION.

SUPPOSING it were granted, that God may communicate his Will to us by immediate Action upon our Minds, doth it follow that it is fit and proper for him so to do, if he hath given us Faculties proper for the making such Discovery with ease? To have, indeed, an Information of his Will is absolutely necessary; and such an extraordinary Information would be necessary, if we could not, by the ordinary Methods of Reasoning, easily obtain the Effect of a Revelation,

tion, but as we may, I conceive, such an extraordinary Communication is altogether needless.

ANSWER.

It must indeed be confessed, that the divine Justice is not obliged to give any extraordinary Information of his Will, however profitable it might be to us. For should he leave Men intirely to their Reason, they could not in Justice be condemned, if they obey strictly the Dictates of it. But it is very proper, that God should vouchsafe such a Revelation, if we consider the Condition in which both the wiser Part of Mankind, and those of lower Rank subsist, and have subsisted, for more than three thousand Years. The Wiser, indeed, might go far in making a Discovery of the Will of God, and in fact they have so done, by their Care, Industry, and Application. Yet it is not impossible, but that the Rule of Morals revealed to the first Man, or the moral Rules of the *Old Testament*, which is much older than theirs; or, that the religious Precepts of the *Jews* might have been learned by them; and so have been of great Use to them in forming their Precepts, and Rules of Morality. So that upon a Supposition of any of these Cases, they were not the sole Authors of them: But, if they were, the Errors into which

they fail, shew plainly how expedient a divine Revelation was for them, to carry on their Schemes with greater Exactness and Truth. Had they studied and acknowledged that, they would not have contradicted each other in many Points; this would have supplied their want of Abilities, removed their Prejudices, and over-ruled their Doubts; and shewn their Duty plainly, though they should not obey it: Or if their own Reason should be able to make such full Discovery of a moral Rule, still a Revelation would have made it out more plain, and over-ruled all Objections against it, by giving it the Sanction of divine Authority; a most infallible Rule to proceed by. For we have no Reason to obey any Precept whatever, but the Will of God, unless some Reasons of Prudence, or the Pleasure and Satisfaction of doing what is right and just, which will often be of small Weight to ballance against Passion, or Interest; and since Revelation discovers the Will of God with ease, it must be much preferable to the Light of Reason, because in the one Case we have the Rule directly set before us; and at one View see the Reason on which it is founded; but in the other Case we are not capable of discovering it, without tedious and
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nice tracing every Thing to their first Principles.

AND if Advantages arise to Men of great Abilities from a Revelation; most certain it is, that much greater must accrue from it to Men of a Meaner, by how much more the Ignorant want Instruction than the Wise. If then a Revelation be necessary for Men of all Capacities, whether wise or ignorant, how can a Rule of Morality, founded upon natural Reason, be inculcated without it? It cannot be done by Terror, as that would be a kind of Persecution, and has no End, but that of guarding the Good, and cannot reclaim the Vicious, nor can it secure Men from the Wickedness of their Hearts. By Instruction, indeed, something this Way might, and has in fact been done, by ranging our Ideas in so proper an Order, that Truth will appear in a much stronger Light than without it. Yet the Heathens have done very little this Way, but left the lower Sort of People to find out a Rule of Conduct for themselves, except a few of a more noble Temper who have erected Schools for Instruction, purely for the Use of their own Scholars, of no Service to one in a thousand of any Body else.

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OBJECTION.

THAT so little hath been effected by Way of Instruction in former Times, was in a great Measure owing to the Indolence or Negligence of Men, and not to any Deficiency in the Method; which, with due Care and Industry, might be sufficient to support the Cause of Virtue.

ANSWER.

IN order to effect any Thing considerable, this Way, much indeed will depend upon the Capacities of the Instructors, who must as well have a full View of Matters themselves, as of the Art of communicating their Knowledge to others; which all Men have not, their particular Way of Thinking, and perceiving Ideas, disqualifying them for that Purpose, or the Want of the Knowledge of Language fit to represent their own Ideas in a regular Manner from first Principles to Conclusions to their Hearers; and of all those Defects, both on the Part of the Instructors, and those who are to be instructed.

IF it be replied, that the Want of all these Particulars, will as much disqualify Christian Priests from inculcating Christian Doctrines, as Teachers of Morality on the Principles of natural Reason. I answer,

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that I do not say, that the latter Method of Instruction is intirely of no Use at all; for certainly the World has been something better for it: But that it is prodigiously deficient, as has been proved, which renders some other Method necessary, which I affirm is Christian Instruction. Yet the former Method is not only intirely laid aside, but improved and altered; and suited better to the Capacities of both Instructor and Learner; not by proving the Reasonableness of Precepts, by collecting them from the Reasons of Things, but by founding them on the Will of God; which is indisputable. And here I must observe, that there is no Colour for asserting, that the Credit and Authority of a Teacher will be sufficient to Influence the Hearers, and therefore supply the afore-mentioned Defects, since daily Experience sufficiently proves the contrary, that often the more ignorant Men are, the more obstinate, perverse, and conceited of their own Skill and Knowledge, how to direct their Lives and Actions, and not so apt to give credit to meer human Authority and Reasoning, in learning practical Doctrines, as they are in speculative, where their Passions and Prejudices are not so much concerned, to hinder them from listening to the Truth. But supposing that Men were not so oppinionated of
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their own Merits and Abilities, to be their own Directors of their Actions; but were willing to submit to the Guidance of Instructors; then these, chosen for them by those in Power, by losing their Authority, and the good Opinion of Men concerning them, may teach to no Effect: And if they were chose by each for themselves, Men may make a bad Choice, and chuse rather those who favour their Inclinations, than instruct their Manners.

OBJECTION.

IF you are governed by Revelation, you must take every Thing upon Trust, and therefore, if the same Authority promulgated a different Religion, we are obliged to receive it: But if we are governed by Reason, we are not to admit any Thing farther than as we see it reasonable.

ANSWER.

To be governed by Revelation, is to be governed by divine Authority: And if indeed we are not to be governed by divine Authority, I have vainly argued against the Sufficiency of human, since even that is opposed, and argued against in the Objection. To confute which therefore, I shall prove that there is no Inconsistency between being governed by

Reason, and being governed by Revelation, but that we may possibly yield an absolute Submission to them both.

THE Truths learnt by both, are not inconsistent with each other, although Reason be the natural Faculty, by the Exercise of which we discover the Truth, and Revelation, that extraordinary Act of God, which impresses it upon us: So these two Ways, although different, of arriving at the Truth, must be very consistent, altho' they be different. As by Reason here, I understand right Reason, exclusive of the Collections of an ill-conducted Reason, and Revelation, some real, true Act of a supreme Being, by which he discovers his Will and Pleasure to the World; both may be equally true, or God must be deceived, or capable of deceiving us, which is contrary to Reason, and as the Truths discovered are consistent, so are the Principles by which they are discovered: And if these do not oppose each other, than we may fairly, and safely submit to both.

REASON tells us, that we ought to submit to God revealing himself to us, by immediate Revelation, it being in his Power so to do, we being sufficient Judges of such Facts as are Proofs of it: So that Reason teaches us that we ought to submit to Revelation; they must be consistent
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with each other. It must be allowed, that to be governed by Revelation is to take Things upon Trust, *i. e.* upon the Authority of God, who can neither deceive, nor be deceived, and Reason itself allows it reasonable so to do. Indeed we are to admit of no pretended Authority, against the internal Evidence of any Thing: But where we cannot discover the Truth from that, Reason assures us that we ought to depend upon the Prescriptions of Persons, of Credit and Skill, although we cannot discern their particular Finesses, much more ought we to take Things upon Trust, when prescribed by him who is infallible, and can no more lie, than he can cease to be infinite in Wisdom, Goodness and Holiness. So that to be governed both by Reason and Revelation, supposes no such Contradiction as is contained in the Objection: But that we are to take Things upon Trust when the Authority is good; we cannot ourselves examine the Truth by any internal Evidence. And as whatever Reason, rightly instructed, shall dictate to us, must be true; so whatever God reveals to us must be true likewise: And even in admitting a Revelation itself, Reason is allowed to judge first of the Reasonableness and Fitness of it, and then of the Sufficiency of the Evidence, which is given in

Proof

Proof that it is a Revelation. So that Revelation is useful in order to obtain more easy and perfect Knowledge of the Rule of Life, and there is no Inconsistency between being governed by that, and Reason.

OBJECTION.

THE Reasonableness and Beauty of Virtue, and the Deformity of Vice, are sufficient to enforce the Practice of the one, and to deter us from the other, without any such extraordinary Aid and Assistance as a Revelation: For a reasonable Being cannot but act what is agreeable to the Rules of right Reason, and avoid the contrary; and this has been acknowledged by Heathens as well as Christians. Thus the learned Bishop *Cumberland* says, speaking of Virtue and Goodness, " they are therefore worthy, by reason of their intrinsic Perfection to be desired, although there were no Law of Nature which command them," and *Cicero* and *Plato* have often said to the same Purpose.

ANSWER.

IT must be confessed, that there is in Man a natural Inclination to do what is fit and right, so long as it appears to be so; and which would always be the Object of his

his Choice, although they have the Liberty of acting otherwise; were there not only an Imperfection in our natural Capacities, in discerning what is right and fit upon all Occasions, but even a great many strong Passions, Temptations and Sollicitations, Interests, Pleasures, &c. to draw us to the contrary Practice, against which the mere virtuous Pleasure of acting well is not a sufficient Ballance at all Times, nor are the external Motives, which arise from the Effects and Consequences of our Actions, sufficient to influence us.

TRUTH in itself without some moral Taste, (*i. e.* a quick Sense and Judgment to discern what is right and fit, as well as an Inclination to pursue it in Opposition to all Discouragements, which moral Taste shall carry us farther than the mere Affection and Regard for Truth, as such,) is not sufficient to influence our Actions; if it were, then all Truths, whether natural, or metaphysical, must necessarily have the same Influence on us, which is contrary to Reason and Experience; and if there are Instances wherein Men have foregone any Pleasures, or incurred any Pains, out of an Affection for Truth, it must be on Account of something particular in it, which recommends it to their Choice, besides the internal Excellency of itself, something agreeable

able to their Dispositions, or else they would pursue all Truth with the same Ardency. Yet even this moral Taste, this original Principle so varies in different Men, that some abhor what others often practise with a great deal of Pleasure: And yet if it were alike, unless Men have always Inclination to attend to, and consider it, it would have but little Influence upon their Actions. Outward Temptations, and Passions are apt to urge strongly, and over-power the Mind: In some, indeed, the virtuous Principle prevails, and by them much is effected this Way. But otherwise, if any extraordinary Terror presents itself; or any Advantage is to be gained on the opposite Side, the Principle will have but very small Force, or Influence: Here the Sense of Virtue will not bear out Persons of an ordinary moral Taste, whatever it may do others. If it be said that the real Advantages of a virtuous Course, even in this Life, are so much beyond a vitious, as are sufficient to enforce its Practice, there might be something of Truth in this, were it universally practised, what can possibly support the Virtuous in this Case? There have been, indeed, some extraordinary Instances of Persons, who merely, from the Direction of the Light of Nature, have suffered even Death for the Cause
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of Virtue, but they have been very few, a manifest Proof that the general Practice of Virtue in the World cannot be supported by any such Consideration.

BUT allowing Virtue to be most advantageous, upon the Whole, how will the Advantage be made appear to all Men? Providence brings upon us often many present Evils, how can the Generality of Men be persuaded, that whatever Evils the Virtuous may suffer at present, yet that these, by the Management of Providence, shall be instrumental in procuring us Good.

As for the Method of enforcing the Practice of Virtue, by annexing Rewards and Punishments to our Actions, over and above their natural Consequences, if this be done by the civil Power, as has been shewn, it will be attended with these Disadvantages, That through the Corruption of Ministers, Virtue may be in Danger of suffering, and Vice of being rewarded and encouraged; besides, the Ends of Government will justify Men no farther in punishing Vice, than as that tends, some Way or other to injure the Peace and Prosperity of the Publick, which the grosser Acts of Wickedness only can do. As for Wickedness of the Thoughts, or any secret Sins, as they are not visible to Men; so neither can Men reward or punish them. Besides that there are many

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Virtues,

Virtues, which, were they enforced by the Laws, would lose their very Names, and cease to be Virtues; as Charity, Beneficence, Liberality, &c.

MOREOVER, as Men can neither take Cognizance of, nor punish all Vices; so neither have they Power to reward all Virtues.

WE may conclude therefore from what hath been said, that as God, alone, made the World, and constituted all Things therein, in such an Order, that such certain Fitnesses result from them, it is he alone who can discover to Men all those Fitnesses, and enforce Obedience to them. And since Virtue cannot enforce itself, nor be enforced by Man, it must be done by God himself in an extraordinary Manner, which, as it is possible to be done, and proper on Account of our Ignorance of the Fitness of Things, so it was to be hoped he would do it in a proper Time. It must indeed be confessed, that the Almighty hath so constituted our Nature, that Happiness shall be the natural Consequence of our Well-doing, and Misery of our Evil-doing, even in this Life, yet as those natural Consequences are often hindered by the Corruption of Men; and when they are not, as every one cannot so nicely examine his Actions, as to perceive those Consequences immediately: It follows that the Discovery
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of some other Means for promoting Virtue;
i. e. the Revelation of certain Rules of Life;
 and of future Rewards and Punishments to
 be annexed to our Obedience or Disobedi-
 ence of them are highly advantageous; and
 especially, if the natural Good, or Evil,
 which are the present Consequences of
 Men's Actions, which often is the Case,
 should prove so remote, as not to be ea-
 sily discerned; or, if the natural Evil be
 less than the present Advantage, or natural
 Good, than the present Disadvantage,
 which may arise from the contrary Course;
 or both.





C H A P. VII.

That human Reason cannot, in all Respects be a competent Judge of the Reason, and Time, and Matter, and Manner, of any divine Revelation being delivered to the World. But that as far as it can judge the several Revelations have been suited to the different Times and Conditions of the World, and of the Improvement which they have made with respect to the Morals of Men.

O B J E C T I O N.



IT is intirely inconsistent with the Goodness of God, who gives Men Notice, by their Senses, of what makes for the Good or Hurt of their Bodies, to conceal from them the Knowledge of any Thing which makes for the Good of their Souls, which is far the nobler Part, and to let them continue for many Ages
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in destructive Ignorance and Error, without a Revelation.

ANSWER.

FIRST, I affirm, that what is here asserted is false in Fact, and that God does not give Men Notice before-hand, of every Thing that makes for the Good either of their Bodies or their Souls; if so, Men would not run themselves into so many Inconveniencies as they often do, not only to the Harm of their Bodies, but even to the Loss of their Lives.

WHATEVER Knowledge it has pleased God to bestow upon us, it is all meer Matter of Favour, and we cannot prescribe Rules of his acting with us, in Relation to Favours. For if God were obliged to bestow all Good upon us, then he ought to bestow all Good upon all his Creatures, and if upon them, then there ought to be no Difference in the outward Circumstances of Men and their Goods, and all his Creatures should equally enjoy the same Goods; or else, if we find the Case otherwise we must turn down-right Atheists. God may, doubtless, confer as he pleases his Favours, and if he may bestow different Degrees of Happiness, he may bestow different Means of obtaining it, provided he affords

affords all Men Abilities sufficient to avoid eternal Misery.

OBJECTION.

WHATEVER was the Design of God in communicating any Thing to Man as their Happiness, it equally obliged him, who is universally benevolent, at all Times, and to all People, and in all Languages to have communicated it to them, as in any particular Time, Language, or to any People; and not to have hid from Men for many Ages, the Knowledge and Sense of their Duty; nor given it, as it were, grudgingly, and by little and little.

ANSWER.

THE Reasons of God's delivering any Revelation, must arise from his Fore-knowledge of the Fitness of the Time, and Matter, and Manner, in which it is revealed to the Persons that are to receive it; which Fitness can no more be known to us, than who can be omniscient as he is. Therefore the Reason why God revealed the Gospel at one Time, in one certain Language, and to a particular People, was, because he foresaw, that it was fittest for him so to do, according to his own Fore-knowledge of the Effects of every Revelation. God's Fore-knowledge therefore,
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of the State and Condition of his Creatures, is the Cause of any Thing particular in the Time, and Matter, and Manner of any Revelation; he foresaw that some Nations were fit to receive and listen to it, while others were only prepared to refuse, and have their Damnation increased by it. It was indeed as easy for God to have made it have the same Effect upon all Nations, and in all Times, as in one; but God will act consistent with the Freedom of Men's Wills, and the different Times, and States, and Tempers of Men. God might by an irresistible Necessity make all Men conformable to his Will, and act like mere Machines; but he will do all Things consistent with the Freedom of Men's Wills, therefore, as the Condition, and State of the World are altered, it had greater Occasion for a Revelation at some Times than at others, and in Proportion to the Ignorance and Corruptions of Men, and Temptations to draw them from their Duty. Again, the Want of Knowledge for the right Apprehension of moral and religious Matters, is not owing to God's hiding it from them, but to their own Corruptions, which rendered an extraordinary Manifestation on God's Part needful, which would not have been, had not Men abused their Liberty, and

and impaired their Reason by their own Perverseness.

REVELATION was intended as a Remedy to put a Stop to those Corruptions, which Men, by a wrong Use of their Liberty had introduced; so that God cannot be charged with Cruelty, in withholding that Revelation, which was necessary thro' the Corruptions of Men only.

AGAIN, notwithstanding that in respect to the Persons in general, such a Revelation as this, as it was a Revelation of a proper Rule of Life for the Use of the World, might be expedient enough; yet in Respect of the Thing, as Men wanted Means to apply it to this Purpose, it might be inexpedient, for want of a fit Method to transmit it safely down to Posterity, free from willful or accidental Corruptions, which Method was supplied by the Invention of Letters, which is farther confirmed by this Circumstance, that the sacred Scriptures are the oldest Books extant in the World.

As to that Part of the Objection against a Revelation, having been given grudgingly, and by little and little, the same Reason why God gave it not sooner, may be assigned as a Reason why he added not sooner that Part, or Branch of it which was necessary to make it compleat, as at
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some Seasons it was not necessary, nor expedient that God should grant any Revelation at all, or as it was necessary to refer it to a more proper Season, so at others it was necessary that he should grant it in such a Measure, and defer the completing it to a more proper Season. Again, as much was revealed as the several particular Times of the World required. Our first Parents had probably a Rule sufficient for their own Use, and the Use of their Posterity, had not Men corrupted their Ways, as shall be particularly shewn hereafter, to that Part of the Objection, *i. e.* that if a Revelation had been delivered at all, it ought to have been delivered to all Persons, I answer; that the *Jewish* Law might have been profitable to other Nations as well as they, and in Fact it was so, although some might not make a proper Use of it: And although some People may still be ignorant of the Christian Religion, that can be no Objection against the Religion itself, but rather against the Folly and Obstinacy of Men in rejecting it, or the Want of Industry and Encouragements on the Part of those who enjoy its Light, in not imparting it to others: Moreover, we may conclude from several Places of Scripture, that although the Gospel be not as

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yet universally promulgated, yet there will come a Time when it shall; so that the afore-mentioned Reason which will justify God in not giving a Revelation sooner, will answer for its not being as yet universally promulgated, if we consider how long it is since the Gospel has been promulgated, and how long the World may still last, when there will be Time for promulgating it. We may upon the Comparison reckon this but as the infant State of the Gospel; for if the World should last for Millions of Ages to come, we can no more object against God's not giving the Gospel sooner, than we can against his not giving us Reason the first Moment of our Birth: Again, the Circumstances of the World; our want of Intercourse with the other Part of it; of the Knowledge of their Language, and their Ignorance of the Credit of those Historians, and other Proofs, on which the Evidence of our Religion is founded, render the sudden Promulgation of the Gospel impracticable, until all these Matters are amended. And yet although the Gospel be not so universally promulgated, we may from hence very well justify the Divine Conduct, that as he will not call Men to Account, nor condemn for the Ignorance of the Gospel, nor judge them by it, if it were not in their Power to learn its Doctrines

trises and Precepts ; neither can Men charge God with Cruelty for not vouchsafing to them such Knowledge ; that Rewards and Punishments might be the Consequents of such Actions, as they had a Freedom to do, or to avoid,

OBJECTION.

MOST certain it is, that, whether God of his infinite Justice, or Mercy, to Mankind, revealed the Gospel to them, they equally obliged him, at all Times, and to all People, to reveal it to them, since the Effects of both ought to be unbounded,

ANSWER.

NEITHER of them oblige him any farther than as his infinite Wisdom foresees what the Effects will be of such Revelation ; whether good or beneficial to Mankind, or the contrary, that is, how it will affect the various Tempers and Dispositions of Men ? Whether it will raise more to Happiness by accepting it ; or, plunge more into Misery by their blameable using or abusing it. It is his Will that all should be happy, by chusing Good and refusing Evil voluntarily ; and as he foresees what Use they will make of the Means he affords them to the Increase of their Happiness, or Misery ; so he affords or

withdraws those Means from them; and if God with-hold his Revelation from *Chorazin* and *Bethsaida*, and revealed it to other Nations, it was not because they did not stand in as much need of it as the others, but because they were not so well disposed to receive it.

AGAIN, this Argument bears as hard upon natural Religion, as revealed; for it might be objected against it, why should not God, who discovers himself to Man in the Use of his Reason, make the same Discoveries to them, at all Times, to all of them, and in the same Degree? Why should he not give as large a Share of Understanding, and Skill, to Infants, to Ideots, yea, and to Brutes themselves as to wisest of Men? Why should he not bestow on them all that Happiness that he is capable of bestowing, and all the Faculties which he can bestow capable of enjoying that Happiness? Why were any Creatures produced at all? Or if any were, why not the most perfect that he can, created from all Eternity?

MOREOVER, the State of the *Jewish* Religion, and the Disposition of the *Roman* Empire, rendered the Time of our Saviour's Coming very fit and proper; because his Gospel was then easier, and more successfully propagated, than at any other Time

Time it possibly would have been, as all other Religions in the World were then deficient, and the Generality of Mankind better prepared, better qualified, and better disposed for the Reception of a new one. For, as to the Religion of the Heathens, as Men were more conversant in the Study of it, they daily discovered more and more of its Defects; the Philosophers themselves found how necessary it was, that some more sure Guide should come into the World, and deliver them some new, and better Scheme of Religion, than had yet been discovered; and some of them were fully persuaded, that one would certainly come one Time or another; and they must have been supposed to have been willing to listen to any new Institution of Religion, so well recommended to the World by the Appearance of a divine Revelation as the *Jewish* Religion was; and as to the *Jewish* Religion, although it was calculated for the Use of that particular People, when the *Romans* had dispersed and subdued them, and established a universal Peace through the whole Earth, and Men's Minds were freed from the Feuds and Animosities of Wars and Tumults, and intirely at Leisure to attend upon religious Enquiries, when Arts and Sciences flourished, by a Desire of Learning, which so universal a
Peace

Peace would naturally excite in the Mind^s of Men; it is not to be supposed but that they would make it their Business to Study the Religion of a People who had made so very considerable a Figure in the World then as the *Jewish* had done.

Now the chief End of that Religion, was the Promise which it contained of a Messiah, who was to come and deliver them a most perfect Religion, about the Time of his Coming. It is not therefore to be supposed, but that their Expectations would be very much raised with the Hopes of the Coming of that Messiah; and their Minds prepared to receive him, and to enquire into the Truth and Reasonableness of a Religion, which he should teach Mankind: And besides, the World having been then divided into two Languages, the Propagation of this Religion must needs have been so much the better facilitated thereby, than when it was divided into different Factions, Languages, and Governments. And now let all these Circumstances be put together, and it will be very apparent, that the Time in which our Lord came into the World, and preached his Gospel, was the most fit and proper Time that possibly could be, for the Reception of them both; when it was the likeliest for his Gospel to be propagated, and to have
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its most beneficial Effects in the Reformation of Mankind ; when it was the likeliest that most should be raised to Happiness, for embracing them, and fewer be sunk into Misery by their blameable using or refusing them. Yet neither is it reasonable to conclude, as a certain Writer hath done, that because our Saviour did not appear until four thousand Years after the Entrance of Sin into the World, that therefore Men were left for so long a Time quite destitute of the Means of Salvation ; because the Merits of Christ are as effectual for the saving of those who lived before his Coming into the World, as those who came afterwards ; for the Promise, or Covenant, made to our first Parents, of the Seed which was to come, &c. which was always looked upon as the Promise of a Saviour to come to deliver them and their Posterity from the Curse of the Fall, and Restoration to eternal Happiness, lost by Sin, was confirmed to the Patriarchs, *Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, there called by God an everlasting Covenant, in which all the Families of the Earth should be blessed, and was finally compleated and fulfilled to us, in these last Days, by the Coming of a Saviour into the World, and in the Hopes of the Accomplishment of this, they often supported themselves under the
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many Troubles and Afflictions of the present Life. In View of which Covenant, and as constant Memorials for them to take notice of it, our first Parents had some particular Precepts delivered to them, in particular that of Singing and Praying; to *Noah* a few Precepts only were given, which might be easiest taught and retained, as you may read in the ninth Chapter of *Genesis*, and doubtless the Circumstances of Men at that Time would not allow that more should be given them. Afterwards, a few more special Commands were given to *Abraham*, in order to preserve him free from the general Corruption, as he had before taken care to preserve himself, for which, and other Reasons, he was appointed by God to be the Father of all the Faithful. The Law of *Moses* was a compleat System relating both to Religion and Government, very agreeable to the Condition of that People, as they were a peculiar People to God, of whom he had a peculiar Care, that they should not, by communicating with other Nations, be corrupted with their Idolatry. These Institutions, would not perhaps have been received at any other Time, although they were then; for some Reasons for which we may not be very proper Judges, and which is highly probable from hence that the legal Institution

tution was a preparatory Introduction to Christianity. So that the Life and Immortality brought into the World by the Appearance of our Saviour, the second Adam, is as extensive as the Death which was brought in by the first *Adam's* Transgression and Disobedience: And our Lord is therefore represented as the Son of Righteousness, which defuses its healing Influence both backwards and forwards, to warm and enliven the Generation past, as well as those to come.

OBJECTION.

No impartial Man can think the World much the better for Christianity, for Christians are not only not better than Heathens, but what passes for the Christian Religion, has made Men in several Respects much worse than the Heathens themselves.

ANSWER.

I may not only deny the Facts here asserted, but charge the Objection of Injustice; in affirming that of real Christianity, which does in truth belong only to Nominal: For if Men act as if they never heard of Christ, or his Gospel, they are so far indeed worse than Heathens, that they sin against the clearer Light, than they; but these, though they are baptized

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into Christ, are no Christians as their Actions run counter to the Spirit and Nature of Christianity; so that this Corruption of our Religion is not chargeable upon the Nature of the Religion itself.

THERE ought to be an Equality in the Choice of the Persons, whether Heathens or Christians, who are to be compared, they ought to have the same Instruction in the Principles both of Christianity and Philosophy, and if so, I doubt not but the Christian will far exceed the Heathen. For this Reason, that there is no Precept that is taught by Reason, but it is confirmed by Christianity, and become a Part of it; but there are several weighty Precepts of Christianity which cannot be at all collected by Reason. So that as the Light of the Christian far exceeds that of the Heathen; so the Morals of the former, all other Things being equal, must far exceed those of the other.

BESIDES, if Wickedness and Cruelty may be charged upon the Christians, the same, or worse, may be charged upon the Heathens; and as the former did not learn their Cruelty or Wickedness from their professed Religion, which strenuously forbids them. So, it is to be believed that they would not have been better, but rather worse, if they had been Heathens.

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OBJECTION.

THE great Ignorance of the Heathen World, has not been owing to any absolute Insufficiency of the Light of Nature itself, but to the Fault of Men, in not making a right Use of that Light; but now, where Learning is cultivated, Men are sufficiently able to discover for themselves all the Obligations and Motives of Morality, without the Use of Revelation.

ANSWER.

THE best Way of discovering what natural Reason can do, is by examining what in Fact it has done: And although all those Motives and Obligations of Morality might, in the Nature of Things, be deducible from the Light of Reason, it is certain that in fact the wisest of the Philosophers were never able, to any effectual Purpose, to do it, but acknowledged their Want of some farther Assistance. Nor has natural Religion ever subsisted in any tolerable Degree of Perfection, but among such, concerning whom it is far from being a clear Case, they had not Assistance from divine Revelation; and there is no Reason to imagine, that we ourselves should have been wiser than others, if we had not the same Assistance. For if the Relation in which God

stands to his Creatures be incomprehensible, then the Fitness of such Actions towards us, as are founded on that Relation must likewise be incomprehensible; which Fitness must arise from his Knowledge of all Events that would follow from those Actions. Therefore, as the Reason of God's Actions in the Creation are unknown to us, because we are incapable of comprehending the Grounds and Reasons on which he proceeds; so the Reasons of his Revelations are unknown to us, because we know not the Effects of such Revelation: God alone therefore knows what will be the Consequence of all his Actions, therefore he alone can tell what is fit or unfit for himself to do; and as Men can give no Reason why they are so created, so neither can they explain what different Rules should be revealed to them for the Conduct of their Lives, or when is a proper Time to deliver them: Therefore, that human Reason cannot possibly judge of the Reasons on which divine Revelation is founded, is very plain and evident.

OBJECTION.

SINCE God is so mysterious, as to his Revelations, that we do not know the Reason on which any are founded, how can we be

be blamed for refusing one, or rejecting another.

ANSWER.

IF we may be blamed for refusing or rejecting any Notions of God, though we do not thoroughly comprehend his Nature, then we may as much be blamed for listening to false Revelations, as for Idolatry.

AGAIN, it is sufficient, in order to our believing any Revelation, that God makes it appear that it proceeds from himself, in the same undeniable Manner, that he makes it appear, that Creation and Providence proceed from himself: So that we are as highly obliged to believe Revelation, as Creation and Providence to proceed from God, though we are as unequal Judges in both Respects, as to the Mysteries of either. And we have no more Reason to think, that God should require nothing of us by way of Revelation, then those Things whose Reasonableness we can account for, then, that the Creation and Providence should be just as we could account for them; and if we are once sure, that such a Doctrine is revealed by God altho' we know not the Grounds and Reasons of it, we are as much obliged to believe it, as to acknowledge Creation and Providence to proceed from him, though we cannot account for every

every particular Reason or Work in them. For the very Reason why many Revelations are mysterious, is because God is pleased to be mysterious in many of his Proceedings with the Sons of Men. So that this Argument is as strong in Defence of Atheism as it is of Deism; for there is no more Reason to deny there is an over-ruling Providence, though many of its Steps are so very mysterious, as not to be traced out by human Reason, then to believe there is a God the Author and Revealer of Religion, though often we cannot fully comprehend the Reasons of those Revelations he delivers: And if we are obliged to reject every Revelation whose Fitness and Expediency our Reason cannot comprehend, we are likewise obliged, if we cannot discover the Reason of every Dispensation of Providence, and every Work of the Creation, to deny both the Being of God and Providence: Our Judgment of the external Excellency of a Revelation is no Proof of its Divinity, but rather the contrary, since it is to be thought, God would not make a Revelation of such Things as are already manifest to Mankind by their human Reason.

OBJECTION.

As Reason is given to Man to be his Rule and Guide in Matters of Religion,
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so he ought to follow the Guidance of that alone, and to lay aside Revelation; but to lay aside the Use of that, and to govern ourselves by Revelation, is certainly the highest Proof of the greatest Enthusiasm and Bigotry in the World.

ANSWER.

MOST certain it is, that Reason is to be always our Guide, and we can no more renounce its Direction, than we can lay aside our Humanity, or forbear to see with our own Eyes: But then we are to consider, that Reason must submit herself to the Guidance of Revelation, sufficiently attested to come from God. And this is so far from renouncing our Reason that it is the highest Perfection of it; and nothing can be more agreeable to that, than to listen to the Voice of Revelation. As to the Charge of Bigotry against Christians, which is nothing else but false Reasoning in Matters of Religion, there is no more Justice for that, than there is for the same Charge against those who oppose it; for there is as much Bigotry in zealously opposing any Revelation, sufficiently attested to come from God, as in embracing a false Religion: And as to the Light of Reason, it is no more natural to us, than the Language and Customs in which

which we are educated, and it is chiefly owing to this Light of Education, that we find out, and come to the Knowledge of what is Good or Evil, Right or Wrong. And since therefore Reason has nothing natural of her own, but what is owing to Education, we do not abandon our Reason, whether we receive or reject a Revelation. And if all the Light we have is owing to Education, and the Authority and Instruction of those among whom we live, and reason has instructed, is the sole Agent whether we receive or reject Revelation, how unreasonable is it to refuse a still farther Light from Revelation? Even our Education is esteemed a second Nature, and has a great Efficacy even in Things unreasonable and unnatural: And if we are always to follow the Light of Nature, we may some Times follow this second Nature leading to Things unnatural and unreasonable; and therefore, its Dictates must often be as erroneous and false, as the Education they have received: And as our natural Reason is imperfect, so must our natural Religion. But to assert, as has been asserted, that natural Reason is a standing Rule of Duty for Men of the greatest, as well as the meanest Capacities, is as absurd, as to assert, that this second Nature, or Education must be absolutely perfect,

perfect, and often makes even the worst of Crimes put on the Appearance of Good.

OBJECTION.

IT cannot be imputed to any Defect in the Light of Nature, that the Heathens ran into Idolatry, but to their listening to their Priests, who imposed upon them by passing their pretended Revelations for divine Oracles.

ANSWER.

IF Reason suffers herself to be imposed upon by Fallshoods, it is as certain a Sign of her Imperfection, and Weakness, as can possibly be; for were she sufficiently conscious to herself of her own Strength and Perfection, it is impossible that she should suffer herself to be imposed on by Lies and Impostures: Whether Reason, voluntarily, or involuntarily, suffers itself to be imposed on, it is a certain Sign of its Weakness and Imperfection; if voluntarily, then such an Imperfection is much greater than any Ignorance, Blindness, and Imperfection, whatsoever. Whatever Imperfections are by Custom desirable to our Passions themselves, or Imaginations, yet in a strict Sense ought to be ascribed to our Reason as the sole Principle whence they proceed. There is indeed a Light of Reason common to

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Man; but then there are as different Degrees of this Reason in Men, as there are of Wit, and of good or ill Nature, not only in different Men, but even in ourselves, and it is our Reason that is the sole Agent in all our Passions and Tempers; which only differ so far from Reason, as Reason differs from herself; and it is that absolutely perfect Faculty of Reason that has been Guilty of all the Faults and Miscarriages that ever Men have committed.





C H A P. VIII.

P R O O F S.

That there have been several Revelations delivered to the World; and that Sacrifices are of divine Institution proved at large; that the Doctrine of Christ and his Apostles in particular, is a divine Revelation.

O B J E C T I O N.



F the Condition of human Nature be such, that a divine Revelation is expedient, then we may conclude, not only that God actually hath and will reveal his Will to Mankind, but that of Necessity he was obliged so to do, and therefore there must have been an universal one, since Necessity is not limited to Times and Persons; but since no such Revelation has been given, we may conclude, that no Revelation at all was expedient, that God was not obliged to deliver any at all; and conse-

quently there never was, or ever will be any divine Revelation,

ANSWER.

THE Expediency of a divine Revelation is no Proof that God was obliged to deliver any such, since his Goodness is justified in this, that he will not call Men to Account for the Neglect of any Duty, where he has not given them sufficient Means of knowing it; but rather that it is highly probable that he would do it; for were it impossible, or improbable, that there should have been any Revelation, all Pretences to it ought to be rejected. But since the Probability is evident, it is our Duty to examine the Reasons urged for it, and to embrace it upon sufficient Evidence of its being so, and an inexcusable Neglect, and Contempt of the Almighty to omit so doing.

FIRST, That there has been a divine Revelation is evident, because the Original of Sacrifices cannot be accounted for any otherwise than from thence; and this will appear plainly, by removing all other Originals whatever of this Worship. The Thoughts of Men cannot possibly devise any other Original of them but a divine Institution; besides one of these three; either, 1st, The primitive Law of Nature; or, 2^{dly},

2dly, The Invention or Tradition of Men; or, 3dly, The Suggestion of the Wicked-one, the great Enemy of God, and Man; Now it may be evinced with Reasons not to be gainfayed, that none of these could have been the Original of such an Institution: For, 1st, if the primitive Law of Nature had been the Original of it, then the Obligation to worship God in this Manner, must have been universally the Law that God hath written upon the Hearts and Consciences of Men, is not a particular, but universal Law; it extends to all Ages of the World, and all Places of the Earth, and if this had been the original Worship, Man in his State of Innocence had been bound to observe it. The principal Design of all bloody Sacrifices, was to make an Expiation, or Attonement for Sin, which the innocent State of Man stood in no need of, nor can it be supposed, that God should oblige his Creatures to acknowledge a Guilt when there was none.

AGAIN, every Obligation appointed by the Law of Nature must be perpetual; its binding Force took place as soon as there was a Man created capable of it, and has continued, and shall continue to the End of the World, in all Ages; nay, our Saviour himself cannot abolish one
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Jot or Tittle of this Law, nor did he come to destroy, but to fulfil it. But we know very well that he hath abolished the whole Frame of typical Worship, himself, and his Gospel, their Antitypes being exhibited, as the Apostle tells us in the 10th Chapter of the *Hebrews*. Nay more, after God had, by Appointment, one particular Place in the Temple of *Israel*, where this Worship was to be performed, he ordered it to be destroyed, by which very Act, he put an End to this Way of Worship; so that the *Jews* themselves, though they would gladly return to it; yet, for want of a Place, have for many Years given it over. And indeed, if we consider the Nature of the Thing itself, the meer Law of Nature, when it is not tainted and depraved, seems rather to oppose such a Manner of worshipping God, as being unsuitable to his spiritual Nature; for there is nothing in the untainted Reason of Man that should inform him, how shedding of Blood could be acceptable to God without his Command? Nay, some of the wiser Pagans have concluded that Sacrifices, however costly, if separated from a holy and religious Soul, are of no Signification whatsoever.

SECONDLY, A second Question is, whether or no the Original of these Sacrifices could
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have been the Product of human Invention and Tradition? The Affirmative of which hath, with much Confidence, been asserted by the *Socinians*, as if without any divine Authority Men had invented this to testify their Dependence upon God, and Gratitude to him for their Increase; and they farther add, that though God did expressly require it of the *Jews*, yet it was only in Compliance with the ancient Custom. This Pretence, however specious it may appear, yet is certainly false, as the Holy Scripture, that Word of Truth, assures us, by which we learn, that it was by Faith *Abel* offered his Sacrifice, which must be supposed divine Faith; which must have a divine Revelation of some Promise for its Warrant and Foundation, and which could be no other than that of the Seed of the Woman, &c. Faith comes by Hearing, and Hearing by the Word of God. It were absurd to say, *Abel* sacrificed by Faith, if his Faith were not built upon such a divine Revelation; yea, it is very remarkable, that our blessed Saviour in the 11th of *Luke*, ver. 50, 51. ranks *Abel* among the Prophets. *That the Blood of all the Prophets*, from the Blood of *Abel* to the Blood of *Zacharias*, &c. Now every Prophet was constituted by divine Revelation, and it were ridiculous and absurd to say, any one could be a Prophet unless he were commissioned

by a divine Revelation from God. Besides, the very favourable Acceptance which this Worship found from God plainly shews, that it could not have been devised by Man. It is generally affirmed, that God did testify unto the Gifts of *Abel*, and shewed his Acceptance of them by sending a miraculous Flame from Heaven that consumed them. This Way of answering by Fire was always esteemed a Token of God's gracious Acceptance, as appears by what we read of *Moses*, *David* and *Elias*, and by the Context we learn that it was by some visible Token God testified his Acceptance, because *Cain* saw, and visibly perceived it. A Worship invented by Man, whatever Shews of Devotion and Humility it may have is always displeasing to God. To imagine the Offering of Sacrifices, by slaying and consuming them, would be acceptable to God without his Order, would be about as wise and agreeable to natural Reason, as to think a Servant should please his Master by burning his Oxen and Sheep without his Leave: All the Beasts of the Forest are Gods, and so are the Cattle, &c. and to Use the Words of a late learned Writer; "How should it enter into the Heart of Man to imagine, that the slaying of a Beast, done in Consequence of no Command of God, should have

“ have any Virtue to expiate Sin; it was
 “ God’s Law to every Creature, in which
 “ was the Breath of Life, that they should
 “ be fruitful and multiply, &c. And he
 “ had taken such Care to guard this Law,
 “ as to give no Permission to *Adam* or
 “ his Sons to use them as Food.” 2dly,
 This was no Invention of Man, because
 there was an early Distinction between the
 clean and unclean Creatures, which could
 have no other Reference but to Sacrifices,
Gen. vii. ver. 1, 2, God orders *Noah* to
 take into his Ark, seven of the clean, and
 but two of the unclean Creatures; those
 that were marked out for Sacrifices were
 Sheep, Goats, Bulls, old and young, and
 what should specify these to be clean more
 than others, which God rejects never to be
 brought to his Altar? Certainly there could
 be no other Reason for this Difference, but
 that the Overplus might be used in Sacri-
 fices of those Beasts that were clean, and
 that of the others a sufficient Number only
 should be kept to preserve the Species in-
 tire; and thus I think it is sufficiently evi-
 dent, that the most ancient Way of Wor-
 shipping God by Sacrifices, could not have
 been introduced by the Invention of Men.

As to the third, that the Original of
 Sacrifices should be the Suggestions of Sa-
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festly disproved by what hath been said, that I shall only observe, that though the Devil did in the *Pagan* World strangely pervert this Worship, insomuch, that they offered even their Sons and their Daughters unto Devils, yet he could never be the Author of any Institution that had so excellent a Design, as the shadowing an Expiation wrought out by the Redeemer. I know it hath been, with specious Colour, objected, that if God had appointed this Way of Worship, there would have been some Record of the Institution, when Things of less Importance, as the Invention of Musick, and Workings in Brass and Iron, are mentioned in this Chapter. But this Difficulty may be removed by representing to you, that as to Matters of Fact, no Argument can be drawn from the meer Silence of Scripture; especially by *Moses*, who designed only a short Account of the World before the Flood, for we do not read of the Preaching of *Enoch* in *Moses*, recorded by *St. Jude*, nothing of the Preaching of *Noah*, yet, *1 Pet.* he is called a Preacher of Righteousness. We find nothing in this Epistle mentioned, how the righteous Soul of *Lot* was vexed daily with the *Sodomites*, yet that is recorded by *Moses*.

Nor indeed was it necessary that *Moses* should mention the positive Order of God, when

when he wrote directly for the Instruction of the *Israelites*, who knew how jealous God was of every Thing that related to his Worship. They knew how dear it cost them, to worship the golden Calf; nor was it therefore needful for him that he should inform them, that it was an Institution appointed of God, who could not but have been satisfied of it by Tradition received from their Fore-fathers. It appearing then, from what has been said, that neither the Law of Nature, nor the Invention of Man, nor lastly the Suggestions of the Devil, have been the Originals of the Institution, it cannot possibly be ascribed to any but a divine Original.

But this is but one Instance of a divine Revelation. I shall prove in the next Place, that the whole Substance of the Doctrines, delivered by Christ and his Apostles, in the Gospel, are founded upon a divine Revelation: But before I proceed, I shall answer a few Objections, and in those Answers, shew, how far our Reason is a proper Judge of the Truth, and the Reasonableness of a divine Revelation.

OBJECTION.

It is objected, that we may judge as well of the Truth and Reasonableness of any Doctrines by their internal Excellency, and

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those internal Marks of the divine Wisdom and Goodness, by which they discover themselves to be Parts of natural Religion, as by any external Proofs whatever ; especially since evil Beings may give the same Proofs of Miracles as good : So that external Proofs can carry us no farther than internal.

A N S W E R.

T H E R E can be no such Thing as an internal Evidence of any Revelation at all. If the Doctrines and Precepts are true, then, although they make it our Duty to believe and practise them, it does not follow that they must be revealed ; since there may be true Doctrines collected from the Writings of the Philosophers, who learned them from the Principles of Reason : So that although all Revelation must be true, yet all Truths are not Revelations. To prove them Revelations therefore, it is necessary that Miracles should be wrought : But evil Spirits may have the Power to impress very strong Notions upon Men's Minds, by doing Works very little different from Miracles, or even, for Arguments sake, by doing Miracles. True, yet since evil Spirits cannot, as we have Reason to believe they cannot, do such Miracles as belong only to him, in whose Hand is the Soul of every living Creature ; *i. e.* raising the Dead : And since their Pow-
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er must submit to that which is superior, upon a proper Tryal, or Opposition between them, to prove a contrary Doctrine by Miracles, as it did in the Case of *Moses* and the Magicians; then we have sufficient Reason to believe, that those are sent by God who do those Miracles; and that the Doctrines, which they teach in God's Name, are true; because the Goodness of God will not suffer such Miracles to be wrought in Confirmation of an Imposture: So that, altho' Men should not be competent Judges of the Truth of any divine Revelation, by its internal Marks and Characters, antecedent to such external Revelation; yet the Goodness of God is sufficient to secure them from Delusion, in all Cases where wise and good Men have no possible Means left, whereby to discover a Truth, or detect a Falshood. God, we may be assured, will not suffer wise and good Men to be impos'd upon, by suffering any false Doctrines attested by Miracles. For that were in Effect the same, as if God wrought the Miracles himself to impose upon Men. Besides, we cannot suppose, that evil Spirits would overthrow their own Kingdom, by working Miracles to confirm any Doctrine, which tends either to promote the Honour and Glory of God, or which is not
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contrary to, and inconsistent with, these great Ends.

WE may be certain therefore, that if any Doctrine be reveal'd, and prov'd to be so by the Working of Miracles ; that if that Doctrine tends to promote the Honour and Glory of God, and universal Righteousness among Men ; or if it be not contrary to those Ends, it is certainly a divine Revelation. And these Miracles, altho' they are but Facts, and prove only the Power that produces them, there being no necessary Connection between them and the Truths ; yet by Application they may become such Proofs of Truths, as Words spoken are of Men's Sentiments, altho' in themselves but articulate Sounds ; or as Seals are of Confirmation in Contracts ; and he who claims Authority, as commission'd by a supernatural Power, to teach and preach certain Doctrines, proves the Justice of that Claim by working such Miracles as cannot be wrought without it.

OBJECTION

BUT Miracles, however strange, yet can't prove a bad Doctrine good, or a false one true.

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ANSWER.

YET they are sufficient to prove those Doctrines true, that are attested by their Evidence ; and that, not for any Alteration which they make in the Nature of the Doctrines themselves, but that they testify the Credibility of the Revealer ; and that the Doctrines, which they are produc'd to prove, must of Necessity be true, and not false.

OBJECTION.

IF by our Reason we are not proper Judges of the Fitness and Expediency of any Revelation antecedent to such Revelation, and if we have not Power to reject some, and believe others, as we shall judge them fit and expedient, we may be easily impos'd upon by Enthusiasts, and shall not be able to tell which are true, or which false.

ANSWER.

IF the Reasoning be true, we might likewise reason in this Manner: We must understand, what beings God ought to create, and what Methods of Providence he ought to take, antecedently to Creation and Providence, or we could not tell, whether or no they are divine. We must understand all Arts and Sciences, antecedently to all Instruction, otherwise we could not
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be able to judge, when we are rightly instructed.

Again, it is indeed our Reason, rightly instructed, that is to be the proper Judge of the Truth or Falshood of any Revelation; *i. e.* our Reason instructed, and informed by such external Evidences of the divine Operation, or Interposition, as could not possibly be exhibited or given, but to attest the Truth and Divinity of the Revelation. And when they are given in Confirmation of the Divinity of such Revelation, we have no more Power to reject them on Account of any pretended Unworthiness, or Unfitness in them, than we have to deny that God is true; which external Evidences are a Course of Miracles and Prophecies, sufficient to attest the Truth of those Revelations. For as Miracles are Proofs of the divine Interposition; as they are Works, done contrary to the ordinary Course of Nature; so they can only be effected by that Being, which created and governs all Things. And as the supreme Being can alone command us his Creatures, what he thinks proper; so his acting contrary to the Course of Nature, to confirm the Truth of his Doctrines, shews that such Doctrines are deliver'd by him, since no Being can turn the Course of Nature out of Order, but who first created it.

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I now proceed to my Proof of the Proposition propos'd ; *i. e.* That the Doctrine of Christ and his Apostles is a divine Revelation. And this is plain from the following Considerations.

First, It is plain from hence : That it contains nothing in itself false, or contradictory to Reason : If it did, no Evidence whatsoever could prove the Truth of it. For no Evidence can be greater to prove the Truth of any Doctrine, than the Evidence of our Senses which proves it false : But the Christian Religion has all the Beauty and Harmony in it, which can be requir'd, upon a Supposition that it is true, besides all necessary external Evidence of Miracles. Miracles have indeed been objected against, as not being a sufficient Evidence of any Fact attested by them, because many Pretenders have deceiv'd the World, by offering their Cheats as Miracles : But this is no Reason why we should think there are no such Things as real Miracles ; but on the contrary, that they must be, or there would not have been any false Pretences to them. For there is no Contradiction in supposing the Possibility of their being wrought by God, as easily as Works in the ordinary Course of Nature, by a Suspension of the Laws of Nature ; or by Virtue of a Power, which, for ought we know, God may have bestow'd

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on invisible Agents; or by a Composition or Result of those Laws; or by God's acting as he will upon particular Emergencies; and may likewise give to subordinate Agents the same Power, with proper Limitations. Miracles are not prejudicial to, nor inconsistent with God's Wisdom and Goodness; for, as Good may be produc'd in an ordinary Way, it may in an extraordinary: They are not mischievous in their Consequences; for, tho' a present Good of any Innovation of the Laws of Nature may be attended with ill Consequences, yet it is not always so; for any Irregularities, arising from the ordinary Course of proceeding in the Way of Providence, may be corrected by extraordinary Interpositions.

And since they are useful likewise to confirm the Generality of the World in the Belief and Acknowledgment of an over-ruling Providence: For many, who would not be surpris'd at its ordinary Workings, will, in these extraordinary ones, confess the Finger of God; and sincethat even, on some Occasions, they are wrought to reward Virtue, and punish Vice: I say, since they are not prejudicial, but useful on those Accounts, and they are useful likewise to confirm the Authority of the Person, who is commission'd to declare God's Will; for, tho' God may reveal his Will immediately, it is not necessary that

that he should do so; because it may be communicated by him, to whom it is immediately revealed, to others: And if so, he that teaches a supernatural Doctrine to others, must, by working Miracles, give Proof of his supernatural Power to do so, by exerting it in a Manner, as shall convince the World that he has such a Power; since it cannot appear from the Evidence of the Doctrine itself. But to return: The Truth of the Christian Religion is supported by all the external Evidence of Miracles, which are recorded in the four Gospels, and the *Acts*, to have been wrought by Christ and his Apostles.

These Histories are no Forgeries, nor can any Forgery be prov'd on them; for their Truth and Antiquity may be prov'd by the Evidence of both heathen and *Jewish* Writers; the Persons who wrote them could not be deceiv'd, for they declare themselves to have been Eye-witnesses of the Truth of what they wrote; they could have no Interest in deceiving the World, by recording such Things; since all Power was in the Hands of the Heathens, who persecuted those of their Faith with the most cruel Tortures, and would have rewarded them with the highest Honours, if they would have unsaid what they had said before, or been but silent on that Head.

It must be confess'd, that, as Men, they had been guilty of some Faults; but they were not such, as could in any great Degree affect them in their moral Character; and their Plainness, in discovering their own and Friends Faults, is as strong an Argument for them, as the Faults themselves can be against them. Yet, had their Faults been more, or greater, their Sufferings for the Sake of Christ and his Gospel atton'd for them, in that they persever'd in preaching and spreading the Truth, when they were foretold, and therefore they knew, as it actually before had cost their Master his Life, that they should likewise be persecuted to Death; and which actually came to pass; for but one of them all escaped a violent Death.

That they were not mad, or Enthusiasts, as hath been alledged, is evident from hence; that in all their Conduct they acted like Men of Understanding; yea, more, they called Hundreds, who were then alive, to bear witness to the Truth of what they wrote; by whom it is impossible but they must have been detected, had there been any Thing of Falshood in their Relations of Facts: And what still confirms their Truth, is, the Manner in which they are related by the four Evangelists; they differ in Words, but not the least in the Substance of the Accounts

Accounts they give: And lastly, the Credit which was given to them; which appears, in that our Religion was so speedily spread over all Parts of the World, and embrac'd by Persons of all Ranks and Stations, which would have been impossible under so many Discouragements, if they had not been firmly perswaded of the Truth of those Doctrines which they believed.

To return; the Facts recorded in these Histories, by which our Religion is supported, are miraculous, which it would be endless to enumerate; the chief of which are these; that the Dead were rais'd; inveterate Diseases were heal'd; the Blind had their Sight restor'd to them: All which must be certainly true, or we must suppose, not only that Christ and his Apostles, but that the Persons, on whom they were said to have been wrought, and all the Spectators, in all the Countries, where they were said to have been wrought, must have join'd in the Fraud.

There is no Ground for supposing these Effects to have been owing to any latent Powers in Nature, or Composition of Powers. If no Instances could ever have been produc'd of such Effects before; or if they did arise from such Powers, or Coincidents of natural Causes, that
Christ

Christ and his Apostles should hit upon them so luckily in their Application, as never to fail of Success, is one of the greatest Miracles imaginable.

FINIS.

4 AP 65



ERRATA.

PAG. 11. *r.* when the End. *P.* 1, *line* 23. *dele* not.
Ib. l. 28. *r.* conversant in. *P.* 22, l. 3. *for* forme *r.*
some *P.* 23, l. 1. *r.* being. *P.* 24, l. 13. *for* the *r.* that.
P. 28, l. 3. *for* stay *r.* they. *P.* 30, l. 4. *r.* be required.
P. 31, l. 9. *r.* are suited to the different. *Ib.* l. 15. *r.*
'tis impossible but that. *P.* 33, l. 2. *r.* temporary being
the same, and that they are the same in Kind. *P.* 34,
l. 2. *r.* by supposing the divine Attributes different, &c.
P. 36, l. 8. *r.* so that altho' the Name Christianity, &c.
P. 38, l. 11. *for* Creation *r.* Creator. *Ib.* l. 14. *r.* a State
of Corruption. *P.* 39, l. 14. *r.* no doubt but it would
have, &c. *P.* 44, l. 30. *dele* they. *P.* 45, l. 9. *r.* all
the Blessings. l. 13. *dele* it. l. 22. *r.* Man who was.
P. 53, l. 3. *r.* Defence. *P.* 54, l. 13. *r.* other Agents.
P. 55, l. 28. *r.* by being. *P.* 61, l. 18. *r.* religious,
P. 64, l. 2. *dele* it. *P.* 85, l. 5. *r.* to maintain. *P.* 67.
l. 5. *r.* we may. *P.* 73, l. 13. *for* curious *r.* various.
P. 85, l. 22. *r.* and we cannot. *P.* 88, l. 17. *r.* this
Principle. *P.* 98, l. 29. *r.* condemn them. *P.* 100, l. 2.
r. withheld. l. 18. *r.* the wisest. *P.* 104, l. 6. *r.* sacri-
ficing. *P.* 112, l. 12. *r.* Reason thus instructed.

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